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Polite Coyotes

News from the McLean Co. AIDS Task Force

Local Poetry



POST AMERIKAN



BLOOMINGTON/NORMAL

VOL. 25

50¢

NO. 6

DECEMBER/JANUARY 1996-97



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VOL. 25

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About us

The *Post Amerikan* is an independent community newspaper providing information and analysis that is screened out of or down played by establishment news sources. We are a non-profit, worker-run collective that exists as an alternative to the corporate media.

We put out six issues a year. Staff members take turns as "coordinator." All writing, typing, editing, graphics, photography, pasteup, and distribution are done on a volunteer basis. You are invited to volunteer your talents.

Most of our material and inspiration for material comes from the community. The *Post Amerikan* welcomes stories, graphics, photos, letters, and new tips from our readers. If you'd like to join us, call 828-4473 and leave a message on our answering machine. We will get back to you as soon as we can. Don't worry if it takes a while-- we don't meet every week.

An alternative newspaper depends directly on a community of concerned people for existence. We believe it is very important to keep a newspaper like this around. If you think so too, then please support us by telling your friends about the paper, donating money to the printing of the paper, and telling our advertisers you saw their ad in *Post Amerikan*.

Subscriptions

Subscriptions to the *Post Amerikan* are available for the low price of \$5.00 per year for six complete issues. Please send a check (made payable to the *Post Amerikan*) to: Post Amerikan, P.O. Box 3452 Bloomington, IL 61702.

This issue of *Post Amerikan*
is brought to you by...

David, Linda, Matthew, Nick,
Ralph, Sherrin, Stacy, Steve

Post Sellers

Bloomington

AIDS Task Force, 313 N. Main (inside)
About Books, 221 E. Front (inside)
Barnes & Noble, Veterans and Rt. 9 (inside)
Bus Depot, 533 N. East
Circus Video, (Emerson and Main)
Common Ground, 516 N. Main (inside)
Front and Center Building
Gaston's Upper Cut, 409 N. Main (inside)
Law and Justice Center, 104 W. Front
Medusa's, 420 N. Madison (inside)
Mystic Link, 901 E. Grove Suite M. (inside)
Once Upon a Time, 311 N. Main (inside)
The Park Store, Wood and Allin (inside)
Twin City Exchange, 411 N. Main (inside)
U.S. Post Office, Center and Monroe
U.S. Post Office, 1511 E. Empire
Wash House, 609 N. Clinton

Normal

Acme Comics, 115 W. North (inside)
Amtrak Station, 100 Parkinson
Babbitt's Books, 104 North (inside)
Bus stop, (School and Fell)
Coffee World CoffeeHouse, 114 E. Beaufort
Cultural Expressions, 127 E. Beaufort (inside)
Deadpan Alley Records, 129 E. Beaufort (inside)
Mother Murphy's, 111 North (inside)

Champaign

Babbitt's Books, 614 E. Green, (inside)

What's your new address?

When you move, be sure to send us your new address so your subscription gets to you. Your *Post Amerikan* will not be forwarded (it's like junk mail--no kidding!). Fill out this handy form with your new address and return it to us, P.O. Box 3452, Bloomington, IL 61702.

Name _____
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City/State/Zip _____

Due Date:

The due date for submitting articles to the *Post Amerikan* is: (please laser print your articles in columns of 3" using Palatino 10pt. type if possible.)

Jan 15

Good numbers

ACLU.....454-7223
Advocacy Council for Human Rights.830-2521
AIDS Hotlines
National.....1-800-AID-AIDS
Illinois.....1-800-243-2437
Local.....827-AIDS
Alcoholics Anonymous.....828-7092
Animal Protection League.....828-5371
Bloomington Housing Authority.....829-3360
Boys and Girls Club.....829-3034
Clare House (Catholic workers).....828-4035
Countering Domestic Violence.....827-7070
Dept. of Children/Family Services...828-0022
Gay & Lesbian Resource Phonenumber...438-2429
Habitat for Humanity.....829-0693
HELP (transportation for senior
citizens/handicapped).....828-8301
Home Sweet Home Mission.....828-7356
IL Dept. of Public Aid.....827-4621
IL Lawyer Referral.....1-800-252-8916
Incest Survivors Support Group.....827-5051
Lighthouse (substance abuse treatment).....827-6026
McLean Co. Center for Human Services...827-5351
McLean Co. Health Dept.....888-5450
McLean Co. Humane Society.....663-7387
McLean Co. Peace Coalition.....828-7070
Mid Central Community Action.....829-0691
Mobile Meals.....828-8301
Narcotics Anonymous.....1-800-779-6178
NAAFA (size acceptance)
Central IL chapter.....454-2128
National Health Care Services/
abortion assistance.....1-800-322-1622
Occupational Development Center...452-7324
Operation Recycle.....829-0691
Parents Anonymous.....827-4005
PATH (Personal Assistance Telephone Help)..827-4005
Phone Friends.....827-4005
PFLAG(Parents, Families and Friends
of Lesbians and Gays).....663-0831
Planned Parenthood (medical).....827-4014
(bus/couns/edu).....827-4368
Post Amerikan.....828-4473
Prarie State Legal Services.....827-5021
Project Oz.....827-0377
Rape Crisis Center.....827-4005
Safe Harbor Mission(Salvation Army) .829-9476
Sunnyside Neighborhood Center.....827-5428
TeleCare (senior citizens).....828-8301
Unemployment comp/job service.....827-6237
Voice for Choice.....828-3108
Western Ave. Community Center.....829-4807

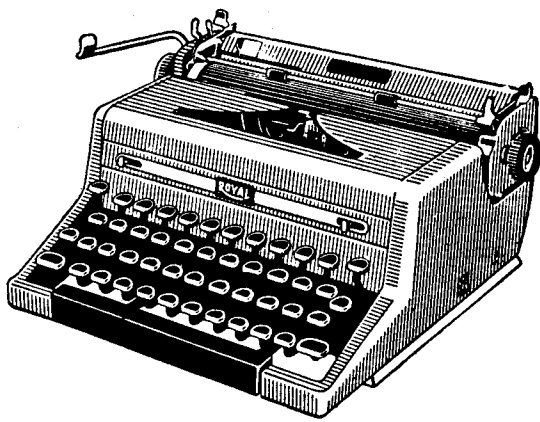


Community News

Secret Santa

The Student Volunteer Center is looking for students, faculty, staff of Illinois State University, and individuals in the community to help make this holiday season a merry one for 300 underprivileged children in the Bloomington-Normal area. To do so, individuals or groups can participate in the Secret Santa program,

To sign-up, please call the Student Volunteer Center at 454-5181 and find out the name, age, clothing size, hobbies, and/or interests of the child you will be sponsoring. Each gift should be approximately \$30 in value. All presents are to be wrapped, clearly labeled, and delivered to the Student Volunteer Center no later than Monday, December 2nd.



Letters

Dear Mr. Leisner.

I read that back in the 14th century various bands of rogues would join forces, elect a leader, and then pillage the land. I did not know that the Democrats and Republicans were around back then.

For the first time in my life I have had the privilege of reading *The Sun Magazine*. "Get a Job" by Frances Fox Piven really saddened my heart, which is not easy to do. I am an ex prize fighter, ex heroin addict, ex bank robber, and I am currently serving 6-20 years for attempted murder. After reading Mrs. Piven's article I must say that I have learned quite a lesson in economics, politics, and history.

There's nothing wrong with America in terms of its soil, its vegetation, its wildlife, and its common folks. What has happened is this: Men who were raised to be law abiding citizens and taught to help their fellow American and to serve their country, have become criminals like myself. The only difference is; I don't own a Brooks Brothers' suit.

But we have to shoulder some of the blame also; we have allowed all forms of skullduggery and chicanery in our dens of government. And in the final analysis, we no longer have public servants; we have an assortment of criminals, murderers, baby killers, war mongers, perverts, misers, petty thieves, hustlers, and dedicated liars who have nicknamed themselves politicians.



The destruction of what is left of the female run family unit is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. The women of America have embarrassed these egomaniacs, who pretend to be human every four years. Our mothers could run this country better with twenty dollars than they can with twenty trillion.

And what ever happened to the C.E.T.A. program? And why not introduce the Marshall Plan that was so successful in Europe during and after WWII here in America? And we should certainly stop wasting the taxpayers' hard-earned money by locking up parole violators whose only crime is changing their address without permission, costing you \$33,000 a year. There's AFDC money right there. These criminals (politicians) must be charged with crimes against humanity.

In closing, I once heard a man say: "Too long have the cold winds of adversity blown against the frail and naked bodies of the poor, only to be clothed with the empty promises of a politician." The man who had the courage to make this statement was assassinated. You Know him Mr. Leisner. It's Martin Luther King. And like Mrs. Piven he too was gifted and anointed to leads the masses. God willing I should be getting out next year and I would consider it an honor to assist Mrs. Piven in any way possible, even with a voting bloc of ex-offenders. I take offense to what these men are doing. They've gone too far in sullyng and maligning God's greatest gift and vehicle for the furtherance of mankind.

With Truth and love,

Charles (Chuck) Sampson

This letter was sent to us from Roger Leisner from Radio Free Maine.

The Ecology Action Center

The Ecology Action Center in Normal welcomes volunteers interested in working in environmental education, designing publicity and educational materials, working with kids and fundraising. They can use your help as many hours as you are available.

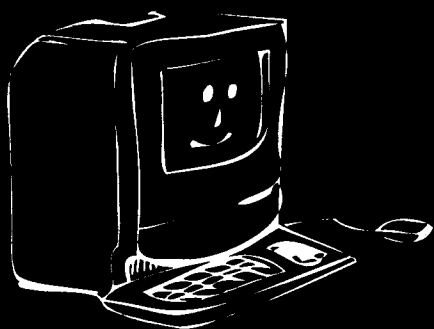
The Ecology Action Center is conveniently located next to the Normal Public Library (College and Fell), adjacent to downtown Normal and the bus line. They are open 2-5 weekdays. Stop by for an orientation or give them a call at 454-3169.

The Boys & Girls Club "Power Hour"

The education enhancement program is in need of tutoring volunteers, particularly for reading. Backgrounds in elementary education, the Spanish language, ESL, or phonics education are a plus, but not required. If you are interested, please contact Elizabeth at the Boys & Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal at 829-3034.

--Volunteer Voice
Student Volunteer Center

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e-mail us at
pamerikan@aol.com



Polite Coyotes: A band to take seriously

While exploring the bands of Bloomington-Normal one is introduced to various styles of music. It is quite simple to find a blues band playing in one place while a heavy metal band may be playing in another. All a person has to do is search out the bands, listen to people's opinions, or just take a chance and walk into any of our numerous music venues in town and enjoy what is being played. Of course, taking a chance means spending a marginal amount of money which, I fear, has overshadowed many people's decision to go out and seek live entertainment. What I am describing here is the fact that our local music scene is not quite what it could be. I have been in several bands over the past ten years and I have noticed a decline in the number of people seeking out live entertainment. I can remember going out and seeing bands that I have never heard of and being surrounded by a substantial crowd. However, this crowd seems to have diminished over the past few years despite the fact that there are just as many bands as there used to be (ah, the good old days).

Though this may seem like a rather dismal picture of our local music scene, there are ways to refute this argument. For example, check out the quality of our local musicians. I, of course, am referring to such bands as *The Spelunkers*, *Stumptwhoopt*, *The Grainbenders*, *The Hi-Fi Bo Bo Bo Kings*, and more recently, *The Polite Coyotes*. I have had several opportunities to check this band out and I have enjoyed myself thoroughly at each occasion.

As opposed to the tenure of some of the aforementioned groups, *The Polite Coyotes* are a young band, just formed in March of this year. But do not let their comparative lack of experience deceive you. The three members of this group can play, and more importantly, they have the attitude that makes a band a vehicle of expression (which is what music is all about). And what they may lack in musical complexity, they make up by the pure emotion and style embedded in everyone of their songs.

I had the pleasure of having a discussion with the members of this band recently, and I walked away feeling the same as I did after seeing them perform. It was a feeling of awe in the sense that I could feel the emotion, the earnestness, the desire to share the human experience with anyone who will listen. Rather odd, I admit, while engaging in discussion without experiencing the music at the same time. But, that is the way it was.

Let us digress into some biographical information before I get I carried away on another tangent. The individuals involved are a rather (self-proclaimed) eclectic group; Mel Gubser on drums, John Brown on keyboards, and Andy Schiltz on guitar. Mel began playing drums when the group was formed; John has been playing music since the tender age of five years old, and Andy is a reformed bass player (just picking up the guitar in the past year or so). The name comes from an old cartoon series entitled "Tex TinStar: Best in the West." They have only played ten to twelve shows since their inception but there are plenty more to come in the future. They all share in the

songwriting process; either by collaboration or individual ideas which may or may not be expanded upon by the others.

The key to the music lies in the simplistic construction of the songs. Mostly, the songs are three or four chords with varying progressions and changes making style and emotion outweigh the technical aspect of songwriting. It is very reminiscent of early folk songs; a little country, a little blues, and a great deal of down-to-earth lyrics. The lyrics are accessible to everyone with a sincere regard to the human condition. And, working in a combination with the lyrical content, are the harmonies that are produced. Generally, bands these days have a strong singer with support from another member of the band. *The Polite Coyotes* focus, in this aspect, is strong three-part harmonies which are integral to the songwriting process.

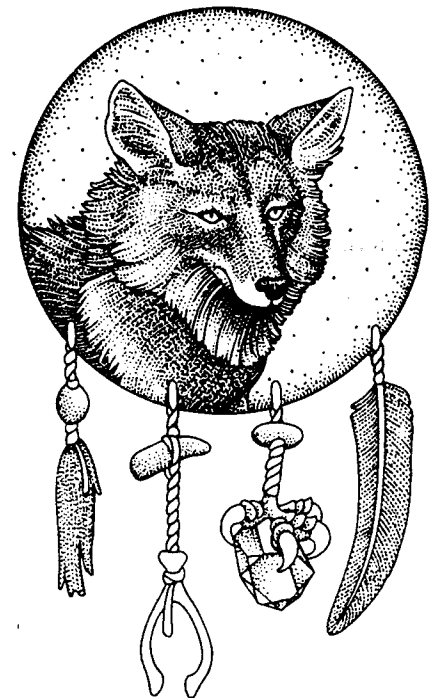
And what, exactly, is *The Polite Coyotes* sound? It is aptly described by John as, "...heavy on the harmonies, heavy on the melodies, sweetness, poignancy, playing from the heart, sincerity...we're very heavy on ambiance..." Andy explains, "...it's not really a sound, it's kind of a feel, it's how the three of us interpret the individual song...each song has its own thing...we're trying to eek out of either the melody or the chords...the essence of the song itself..." John says the style is, "...definitely coming from this home-spun philosophy that's being generated by three people who are friends...we're striving for imminently memorable tunes...stuff that people can't get out of their heads..."

The lyrics are described as being about, "...life and the human condition, the breadth and depth of the human experience..." For example, the song 'The Tall Weathered Stranger' is a, "...slice of life story about a character who is at the end of his rope...something that is unique, yet universal at the same time who can't get into the despair of being utterly alone..." Mel describes another song, 'I Can Fly'; "...it depends upon how you're feeling...a song where you're on the edge, and you're going to jump over or you're going to hold on...that strange feeling of reaching death but falling through the air..." John goes on to explain one of Andy's songs, 'On the Deck', "...it's this miniature vignette, sort of a mini-movie for your ears...a story happens, a feeling..." Andy continues, "I had an idea of a band playing on the Titanic as it was about to crash...it's supposed to be this band playing this song...as the Titanic sinks..."

And, as any musician knows, the songwriting process may be a lengthy chore; getting the phrasing, the lyrics, or the tempo just right. Also, many outside factors may contribute to an original song sounding like someone else's. However, *The Polite Coyotes* approach their songs in a different way. John explains, "I like to create in a vacuum...if I'm going to do country, the last thing I'm going to do is listen to country music..." Mel continues, "...there's where you get your sincerity...it's not a mentorship, this is from you, this is the human experience and the closer you get to your own experience...undeniably it's going to connect with other people..."

"Jazz-inflected, country-waltz"; it must be seen and heard to be appreciated and I hope I have given a representative picture of one of our communities newest bands. When you go and see this band the words in this article will help to bring a better understanding of where *The Polite Coyotes* are at; musically, socially, and philosophically. Listen to the lyrics and try not to get hung up on the lack of musical complexity; that is not the point. This band is about reaching people, sharing our experiences on this earth, and communicating our desires and frailties. It may seem like simple music, but it is much more than that...we are all here together and music is our common bond. *The Polite Coyotes* are here to help us reach a higher level of personal and societal actualization...a band to take seriously, but also a band that is genuinely entertaining.

--by Nick Murray



Coyote ... you devil!
You tricked me once more!
Must I sit and ponder,
What you did it for?

Stumptwhoopt update

The local band *Stumptwhoopt* is in the process of finalizing a record deal with the German record company Strangeways. Although nothing is official (red tape bullshit), they are scheduled to have their first CD released in spring. Although Lothar, an associate with Strangeways, says that they have never had a country band on their label, he is excited and optimistic about having *Stumptwhoopt* signed with them. Hooray for the Stumptwhooptin' band!

--by David Hall



Compost demonstration site

McLean County has a new weapon in the fight to reduce the amount of waste that is produced in local homes. On October 6 a Compost Demonstration Site was built at Comlara Park. The site was built in an effort to educate the public about their alternatives in disposing of organic material produced in their homes.

In technical terms, composting is the controlled decomposition and recycling of organic material into a nutrient rich soil known as compost. However, this jargon means little to most people and does not provide them with any clues as to what the actual process of composting involves or how to go about composting materials for their homes. There are several different methods of "organizing" compost piles on display in order to demonstrate that there is not a single "right" way to compost. As well as instruction on composting, the site also provides visitors with information regarding what compost is and why composting is necessary.

The benefits of this site go beyond the educational experiences it offers to the public. The building of this site was a true community effort. The site's construction was coordinated by the McLean County Solid Waste Program. All the materials for the site were donated by local businesses. The majority of the construction was done by volunteers. Students and faculty from Normal Community High School's Social Studies Club, along with Illinois State University students from the Presidential Scholars Program, turned out to create this lasting symbol of community action.

Heather Brouillet, President of the Social Studies Club and past intern with the McLean County Solid Waste Management Program commented that, "We have accomplished two great things. First, we brought together many aspects of the community including county government, a local school, and many area businesses. Second, we added something to the community that will have a positive effect on the environment for years to come."

For more information regarding McLean County's Compost Demonstration Site, please contact Mark Dravillas, McLean County Solid Waste Coordinator, at (309) 888-5081 or markd@mclean.gov.

Beyond Normal Films

A new organization dedicated to bringing quality foreign and independent American movies to the Normal Theater has recently formed.

It's debut film, "Il Postino," was shown on November 19 at the Normal Theater, with over 600 people attended the two showings.

The group would like to continue to bring movies like "Il Postino" to the Normal Theater once a month, but unfortunately, the folks at the Normal Theater are unwilling to purchase the films or give any proceeds from ticket sales to Beyond Normal Films. (They believe showing foreign films and the like will not go over in B/N)

Beyond Normal Films needs donations of \$35 from at least 150 people to continue to fund and publicize future movies. Members who pay the full amount will receive a newsletter informing them of upcoming events. If you cannot afford the full amount, please give whatever you can. Just think of all the gas money you will save from driving to and from Champaign.

Mail checks (payable to Beyond Normal Films) to Beyond Normal Films, P.O. Box 962, Normal, IL 61761.

Please feel free to add any film suggestions.

--towanda!

World AIDS Day 1996; "One World. One Hope"

World AIDS Day, observed annually on December 1st, is the launching of HIV/AIDS awareness activities and programs planned throughout the year. This year's theme, "One World. One Hope," hopes to "emphasize the need for people everywhere to put aside their differences and to work together to face the challenge of slowing down the epidemic and alleviating its impact. At the same time it reflects a universal aspiration to find the means to prevent and cure HIV/AIDS" (Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS). UNAIDS estimates that there are over 20 million people currently living with HIV/AIDS with over five new infections occurring every minute. Through December 1995, in the US there were more than 513,000 cumulative AIDS cases reported. One quarter of all HIV infections in

the United States are estimated to occur in young people between the ages of 13 and 20. We cannot continue to believe that HIV/AIDS does not affect our community. Illinois Department of Public Health reports that as of June 1996 there are 19,418 cumulative HIV reported cases in Illinois, 68 in McLean county alone.

The HIV Prevention Forum would like to encourage local agencies, businesses, and schools to show their support in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Many activities can be as simple as wearing red clothing (designated color of support for HIV) to covering artwork (to signify a day without art) which are traditional ways to show support for World AIDS Day. HIV Prevention Forum will once again be sponsoring a Christmas Tree at the "Festival of Trees." "Metamora" written by Cesar Madrigal, will be playing at the Normal Community Theater December 3-4 (subject to change). The play, performed by the Social work Department of Illinois State University, focuses on a social worker who eventually becomes 'burned out' and has to deal with one last case. You may purchase tickets in advance from the box office or by calling 454-9720. HIV Prevention Forum information cards will be provided to the public at both events. The McLean County AIDS Task Force and Chestnut Health Systems will be collecting clothing, nonperishable foods, household items, and holiday cards with inspirational messages to include in holiday gift baskets. For more information about the HIV Prevention Forum's events, or questions in general, please contact Diane Haenle at the McLean County Health Department at 888-5435.

--from HIV Prevention Forum newsletter

The mission of the HIV Prevention Forum is to promote the prevention of HIV transmission through public awareness and education in our role of coordinating human services.

Meetings are the first Tuesday of every other month, at the McLean County Health Department, from 3:00-4:00 p.m. Agency Representatives are welcome to attend.

*The Post is at Barnes & Noble,
the Post is at Barnes & Noble,
the Post is at Barnes & Noble.*

The Post American can now be purchased at Barnes & Noble in B/N





Seeing Red

(The following is the text of a speech given by Steve Eckardt at the Festival of Life protest held August in Chicago during the Democratic party convention.)

I'm going to talk about the godawful state of the world, its causes and what we can do about it.

It might seem kind of early for heavy politics, but at the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) we mechanics have already discussed the day's news by 6:30 in the morning.

Yes, popular stereotypes notwithstanding, Joe Six-Pack can read; we can write, and we can think. Whether this particular one can rise to this occasion and also give a speech--well, we'll see.

But nowadays, we all need to rise to the occasion--to read, to write, to speak, to organize--for today we are again at war. It's not primarily a military war, nor is it just in one country.

What it is is an international class war--and a one-sided one at that. The world's capitalists are hell-bent on taking away rights and living standards from the working classes in every corner of the earth. And there is no limit--there's no point at which they'll be satisfied: they will not stop in their drive to crush us unless they run into powerful enough resistance.

And that, my friends, is WAR.

Now I know I'm not the first nor the last person to say that we are at war today, especially since the historical parent of this gathering was itself concerned with a war.

But here's where you need to rise to the occasion and think.

Think, because talk is cheap--after all, everybody can throw around talk of being under attack and say they're for the little guy--Dole can; Clinton can; and the Nazi Pat Buchanan can do it best of all. No, talk is cheap: it's figuring out what's really being said--listening--that costs effort.

James P. Cannon, a famous American working class revolutionary--a stone Red, and a stone atheist--once said "When I die, if it turns out that I've been wrong all along and there IS an afterlife, I'm sure that I will go to heaven--not for what I've done in my life but for what I've had to listen to."

Yeah, him--and all the rest of us too.

We have to listen to "family values" from philandering rich men who swing an axe into education, job training, medical care and food stamps--cutting most deeply into our children.

We have to listen to this country described as "the defender of freedom" from butchers who have the blood of 800,000 Indonesians, two and a half million Vietnamese, and 450,000 Iraqis on their hands.

We have to listen to "it takes a village to raise a child" from those who preside over a brutal, imperialist, semi-colonial system which condemns children to death at the rate of 5000 per hour for the simple lack of clean drinking water and 10 cent immunizations.

We have to listen to tax cut promises of "new opportunities for all" from those running a system so obscenely unequal that the wealth of the top 358 billionaires exceeds the combined annual income of two and a half billion people.

And we have to listen to countless "God Bless Americas" from racists and gay-bashers and women-haters.

God Bless America?? More like God HELP America.

But however odious the lies that we have to listen to, let's not count on being wrong about the afterlife and finding heaven after death.

It's time that they listen to US. We cannot let the rich and powerful turn this Earth into a living hell!

The only answer to their war is to wage war right back. And we can win.

We certainly have the numbers--why, the US

ruling class isn't big enough to fill a football stadium.

And we certainly have the power--everything that is grown, moved, built, mined, or made is done by working people. The capitalists themselves do nothing productive.

What we lack is the clarity and the self-confidence. Too often we are fooled into supporting our enemies:

- we campaign for big business candidates in the name of lesser-evilmism;
- we back war moves against the colonies in the name of "protecting US interests;"
- or we enlist in trade wars in the name of "saving American jobs."

The great Russian revolutionary V.I. Lenin cautioned many years ago: "Beware talk of protectionism, for it always leads to war. And beware talk of free trade for it always leads ... to war."

That's the problem with buying into any of the capitalists' schemes or problems--it's a lose/lose proposition. True, in good times US unions got away with turning their backs on the unorganized, on Blacks, and on workers in other countries in favor of a partnership with management and with government (in particular the CIA).

Now the chickens have come home to roost and Labor finds itself without allies or friends--and increasingly without unions or jobs.

We are in times both perilous and parlous. Already much of the Third World already lives in ghastly conditions of economic depression. The current economic system faces a profound structural crisis, one that it won't solve without humanity paying a devastating price. (See the August Lumpen Times for more on this.)

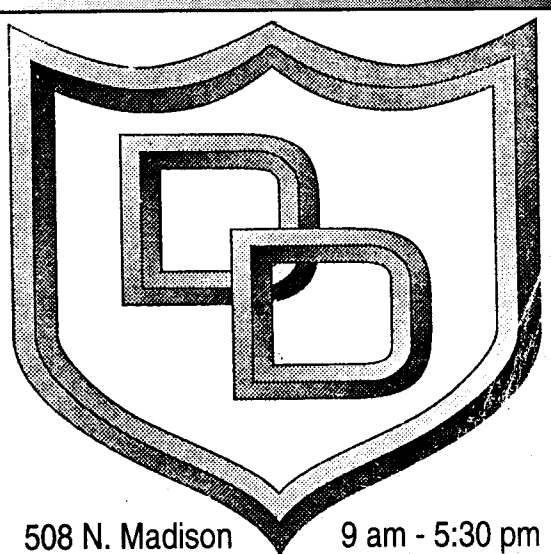
This structural economic crisis not some sudden new event--periodic crashes and tremendous wars have been regular features of capitalism since its beginning. The cycle was just delayed by the awesome level of death and destruction achieved in the last collapse.

But there is a way out.

It takes working people looking out for our own interests, not those of big business and their government: it's not OUR budget deficit, it's theirs. It's not OUR profit shortfall, it's theirs. It's not OUR trade deficit, it's theirs. It's not OUR border, it's theirs. And it's not OUR interests that sends troops to the Middle East, Yugoslavia, or Korea, it's theirs.

It takes working people heeding the words of our revolutionary forefathers: "We must hang together or surely we will all hang separately!"

But you can't just declare unity; you have to build it. That starts with defending the rights of the most oppressed, the most needy, the most outcast. Of course they are the ones most under attack: the undocumented, the prisoners, the poor, the so-called "terrorist" nations.



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Labor cannot be made whole--and will not survive--unless we embrace all the world's pariahs and declare once again "an injury to one is an injury to all!"

That's why everyone--and unionists in particular--need to ensure the largest possible turnout for the October 12th March on Washington called to defend social, economic, and democratic rights--especially those of immigrants. This March can be a turning point, can mark the beginning of unity, can mark the beginning of a genuine fightback.

One of the great moments in the 1968 near-revolution in France came when the government denounced one of the uprising's leaders as a "German Jew"--and within hours the streets of Paris were filled with hundreds of thousands of people chanting "We are ALL German Jews!" Within 48 hours of that, the government fled the country.

Of course we are hardly at that point here--but it sounds like something worth striving for.

So let's all rise to the occasion: build the Oct. 12th March on Washington. Read, write, speak, think and organize. No one will solve our problems for us, we have to take matters into our own hands.

Finally--almost--I'd like to remind everyone of an invitation extended to you by the working people of revolutionary Cuba to come to their country next July and participate both in a World Youth Festival and in an international

meeting of unionists and other activists to coordinate the struggle against global neo-liberalism.

Cuba--where working people took matters into their own hands 37 years ago and have kept them there (with ups and downs) ever since; Cuba where, faced with an deep economic crisis, not a single doctor or teacher was laid off, not a single school or clinic closed. Cuba, where the spirit of Che, Malcolm X, and Patrice Lumumba is still alive.

But come see for yourself. Call the Chicago Cuba Coalition for more information.

I've got one last thing--saved for the end, maybe so I don't get blamed for speaking just for CTA workers like myself.

On August 1st, newly-appointed CTA head David Mosena announced a virtual declaration of war of Chicago's riding public and the transit workers who serve them. Declaring that the CTA is "hurtling toward a wall of financial ruin" Mosena announced his intention to "recreate the CTA from the ground up." He let it be known that no services, no routes, no labor agreements, no jobs would be safe.

Of course Mosena is partly just acting as a cat's paw for the government in Washington, a government that under both the current and previous administrations has been systematically swinging the axe at public transportation monies.

But just how far CTA management can go in devastating public transit is largely up to us--the powers that be don't give a damn how long riders have to wait, how far they have to walk, how safe the equipment is they have to ride--or even if they have to quit their job. Why should they?

But if transit workers, other unions, and the riding public stick together, we can make them care. Of course CTA management will attempt to turn the public against the workers--"it's those overpaid unionists that are making us cut service"--and to turn the workers against the public--"just let us cut costly service and there'll be some money for you."

So we must stick together. Chicago--and the world--needs more and better public transportation, not less.

The coming fight at CTA is just one front in a global war-- and any fightback aids all. That's why I close by saying: see you in Washington October 12--and in Havana in July!

Thank you.

--Steve Eckhardt

Editors Note: Steve's output has moved into taking the form of a monthly column entitled (as you know) "Seeing Red." It regularly appears in Chicago's Lumpen Times and in India's New Wave (printed in New Delhi), and gets irregular pick-up in a few other non-U.S. publications.

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The Poetry Page

Monopoly on Genocide

spirituality, it seems, grows
like a weed in a flowerpot;
firmly rooted crabgrass stands
tall in a neatly edged lawn.

the ground knows her place,
one step closer to awakening
by experiencing some dirt.
once, when i had been cold

for as long as i could remember,
i tried some junk. bought it
cheap, home delivered, best
warmth off the street.
it hook me for life. i'm afraid.

for eight hours (at five an hour
after taxes) every month, northern
illinois gas owns me. i wonder
if the chill lingering in spring
will respect me any less...

if a person needs to know
why the wind blows, get to know
the wind. as with dirt, he is found
where he is supposed to be. at peace
with his nature, every breeze knows
what he does is why it is done.

people who experience love
will one day realize that they
only understand hate.

haphazardly, thousands of individuals
united by a common world-view,
are swept with disgust into neat
stacks and rows. none can be missed

for sanitation's sake. neat rows
disappear and the population
is entombed in asphalt. suffocating
beneath linoleum and concrete,
there is no breeding. on reservations

everywhere we need more booze,
there's been growth and free thinking.
drunks aren't individuals, spray the yard
while you're at it.

crabgrass mustn't disturb
another cozy half-acre.

acid rain from seedy clouds, herbicide
pours forth in angry geysers, all the while
the blue lights flicker. electric gods laugh
and feed on tiny lives, we buzz too close
to our illuminated friends

on television. their beach-front
California estates transcend any cycles
nature intended...

cities full of lives powered
by careers and ambitions
send the monthly dues to auschwitz,
ignoring mass graves of future generations

just beyond the trailer courts. people
who make money off of your freedom
take much more than your rights. i
wonder if you'd hate yourself less
if you got to know you.

—Matt Toczko

January, Illinois 21996

crow flies ever west,
calling in vain to the sun,
setting in silence.

my brother is bathed in orange,
the haze cascades over the barren
fields, shining like gold where frost
grips the soil. the electric poles
are brittle now, everything outside
moves in slow motion, everything outside that
wind.

like tree sap hardening over hours,
crusting at the edges until
the film stiffens deeper,
warmth returns to my feet.
there is still a chill
in my knees and it clings
to the corners of this room. i know
the crow's feet must burn
wherever he rests.

twilight dyes blue shadows
deeper shades of purple. the last
sphere of daylight melts on the West,
pink fading to cornflower,
sunsets, chapped lips.

sitting around their fires,
the ancestors told stories of theirs
who had forests in January to block
the winds; they coaxed the cold into check.
now, the pot of boiling water on the gas
burner keeps time with shivering
crows. where will my brother sleep,
now that the trees are gone?

brother crow glides west,
calling in vain to the sun,
ignoring his pain.

—Matt Toczko

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Toxic waste

cont.

The Water

Naked in the stinging rain
Crawling in the gutter.
I hang my head
and dirty water goes up my nose.
Moaning from the pain
of the rough street
My knees bleed.

Now, as I lay in
the water
'Let the water
take me away'
Wash away the blood
from my wounds
as I crawl
Naked to the world
in the stinging rain
and the water

Let the Water run over me.

Toxic waste is:

Poisonous, radioactive, flammable, explosive, corrosive, mutagenic (damaging chromosomes), carcinogenic (causing cancer), teratogenic (causing defects in the unborn), or bioaccumulative (accumulating in the bodies of plants and animals and thus in food chains). According to the "Toxic Waste Fact Sheet" distributed the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF).

Batteries, household products, pesticides and their containers are all small examples of toxic waste. Larger examples are:

-PCB's (poly-chlorinated biphenyls), which are non-flammable insulating materials used by electrical networks.

-Dioxins: Produced by burning chlorine-containing substances such as plastics, and the process of manufacturing iron, steel and herbicides.

-Heavy metals: Cadmium and nickel plating. Found in batteries (mercury, cadmium, lead), all widely used in industry.

Toxic wastes can not be safely, easily, nor inexpensively disposed of. Landfills are one method of disposal, however, a leak may occur despite permanent sealing with clay, plastic or concrete. Incineration, another method of disposal, prevents formation of dioxins so it is best for industrial wastes such as tar, paint, pesticides and solvents. Chemicals or bacteria can be used to make waste less toxic.

Often Third World Countries become targets of Capitalistic country's waste dumps in a desperate attempt to earn money. This creates another problem: Safely transporting the waste without leaking or spilling into the oceans. Most countries receiving the waste lack the technology to safely handle the cargo.

What can you do?

-Report illegal dump sites to your city health officials, your local Earthlife branch, the Department of Water affairs or Institute of Waste Management.

-Avoid waste creation in your own home: reuse, reduce, recycle.

-Avoid using toxic products at home.
-Dispose of household toxic substances into plastic bags in municipal bins. Never flush poisons down the toilet, or pour them into drains at home, stormwater drains, or rivers and dams.

-Become informed, join forces with concerned people and make your voice heard.

For more information write:

-Institute of Waste Management. National Office, PO. Box 1378, Pinegowrie, 2123.

-CSIR: Environmental Services. PO Box 395, Pretoria 0001.

-Department of Water Affairs & Forestry. P. Bag X313, Pretoria 0001.

-Source: The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

Walk(Leave the Horses Alone!)

I'm living at the end of this century.
Rows of sunlit rooftops with chimneys
attached to gas burning fire places
don't frighten me.
Peoples' strange attire:
Walking in step
in denim and nylon.
Smiling as if to say
"I am me!"
That doesn't bother me either
because I see the truth:
In well planted gardens,
city bus stops,
old barns whose guts tell a story
of pain and joy.
And sad, sad mothers.
(I weep for them in my heart)

The end of this century--

Everyone should walk.

--David Hall



*"They're hazardous after longterm exposure...
but you'll be laid off long before then."*



The World According To Matt

It all adds up

There is a plan at work right now to strip all power and liberties from the people of this country. The media only presents bits and pieces of this scheme at a time, thrown in somewhere with the rest of the news and spaced in timing so that it isn't as obvious as it really is. One by one, our common Constitutional rights are being legislated out of existence, with the hype and hysteria of the day being spoonfed to the people as ample cause. If we don't wake up, recognize this sinister plot, and fight against it, a day may come when our destinies are pre-written by government/corporation contractors.

Because of the danger of drunk drivers, the fact that people are innocent until proven guilty has been forgotten. If you refuse a breath test, you lose your license. This is part of a larger problem dealing with the right to not provide self incriminating evidence. If you invoke this right, they are allowed to assume that you are guilty, and our protection defeats itself...

Although the Constitution clearly states that you may face any accusing witness in court, this is untrue with regards to drug narcs. Now, the supreme court has given pigs free reign to search vehicles during routine traffic stops. But the drug war transcends individual rights...

Since America is suddenly completely crawling with terrorists now, the FBI has the go ahead to perform roving wiretaps without warrants, and extensive files are being made on groups that sound even perturbed with Uncle Sam...

Due to child molesters, porn, and bomb-making instructions, the government is completing the construction of an "ultra-super computer" with both memory and speed capabilities that outdo anything in present use by astronomical multiples. Meanwhile, by 1998 (or so...) every issued drivers license will have a computer chip with a complete personal history in it. Meanwhile, the government is bending every which way to help make it possible to get on the Net, right down to your finances and mail...

This list could go on and on, exposing how insurance companies, Christian fanatics, and environmental pirates are all trying to hold a string on the puppet each of us is slowly becoming. When you look at all of these seemingly unrelated issues, including the mass production of non-lethal weaponry and the grand farce of American democracy, a very bleak future for the common citizen is apparent, and we the people are footing the bill. Turn on, tune in, and drop out. Don't mindlessly play their game. Take the power back by dropping out of the game. Let Emporor Sam know you see through his insanity by refusing to participate in it, rather than casting a ballot or making a lobby donation that only says "I buy your snakeoil, please give me more!"

In yer face, Task Force 666

On October 8, 1996, Task Force 666 (doin' Satan's work on earth!) and a few other equally diabolical interest groups held an anti-marijuana seminar at Parkside Junior High in Normal. The main focus was to convert parents who, due to personal experience instead of blind faith in a deceptive government, rightly see pot as the benign substance it is. The message, of course, was that 90's pot is a much more dangerous drug than the stuff they smoked "in college." This is bullshit (see the last Post Amerikan for the reasons...), and as such it couldn't go unopposed.

As the meeting got underway, a group of 25-30 supporters of truth gathered outside to protest these attempts to spread lies and fear. The cars of those attending the meeting were leafletted with information worth going out in the cold for. Some of the protestors attempted to actually enter and listen to Satan's bacons' message, but were denied access by a school employee.



It is important to stand up to groups such as Task Force 666 and Lighthouse who attempt, out of ignorance and arrogance, to extinguish a group of people with a different perspective than their own. The marijuana subculture knows no bounds; it spans every age, economic, social, religious, racial, professional, and orientation group. Pot unites people who otherwise might never even be in the the same room. It transcends age old feuds that allow the evil powers that be to keep their grip. THEY breed the hysteria and ideas that perpetuate racial disharmony, homophobia, religious bigotry, and all of the other lines playable so that THEY can divide and conquer. If we can all get together and decry the vicious lies and their perpetrators, the henchmen of the devil will lose their main weapon, the ignorance they breed.

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Third encounters of the pig kind

God vs. free choice

One of the most widely believed lies that religions that follow the teachings of the Old Testament preach as truth is the basic fact that their god gave people free choice. This belief is held as such common sense that it is, obviously, never really looked at closer. However, their own mythology denies this accepted truth.

At first, people (er... Adam and Eve) did not have free choice. Prior to eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, they had no knowledge of "evil." Their "free choice" was restrained to what their god deemed not evil. God, of course, strictly forbade them from eating this fruit, preferring mindless sheep to individuals who have to consciously choose to follow him.

This is still apparent in arguments for censorship and illegal abortion (they can't deal with other choices even existing that contradict their personal beliefs). Remember, they didn't **choose**, consciously, to disobey their god. Satan coerced them using the promise of power. Ironically, since they were able to feel this greed for power and had no knowledge of evil, it seems that at this point god thought it was okay.

It is also amusing to note that upon receiving knowledge of evil, the first thing they did was to clothe themselves. This implies that the naked human body, perfectly fine in a world with no knowledge of evil, suddenly became wrong in light of the epiphany. Since they now could choose to do what they viewed as wrong, nudity was too much temptation. As mentioned before, they are still choosing to try to impose this personal cowardice ("I can't be tempted and choose it if it's not available" mentality) on our "free" society.

Once the facts of the story are scrutinized, it seems that free choice is something that this god wanted to keep from people. It was through the trickery of their incarnation of ultimate evil that we received this gift, and they have been trying to legislate it out of existence ever since. It is reasonable to assume then, that these people see "free choice" as evil, and want to claim the right to cut off what they think is wrong and legally punish those who choose otherwise.

Here are some more stories of police harassment that have been phoned in. Patterns are emerging, and a loose think tank of concerned stoners is becoming active. Our strength lies in numbers and the diversity of our common marijuana community, so if you have a story of police harassment stand up and call 829-9920. Stories of harassment not concerning weed our welcome; our government is the enemy of all.

One irate caller pointed out a stereotype that pigs often use for probable cause. Pipes (bowls), waterbongs, and all paraphernalia is legally sold for use with tobacco and fragrant smoking hers (the legal kind). The mere visual perception of one of these accessories should not be reason for further search, for the pig must assume it has tobacco in it.

This specific stoner had been searched (extensively) three times because of a pipe he kept in his car. None of the searches resulted in a bust, and I assume he used this pipe for legal smokes. He suggested that stoners buy a pipe or bong, use it **only** for legal substances (once it has pot resin on it, it can get you in trouble), and keep it in view in your car.

This can effectively confuse their efforts and prove that paraphernalia is not necessarily **drug** paraphernalia. It might also lead to pig encounters that make good stories...

Another brave individual phoned with a tale of blatant harassment. A pedestrian living in west Normal, he was stopped three nights in a row, by the same cop, on the same street, at the same time (One a.m., his parental set curfew) and asked for ID for city curfew verification. Each of the three times he presented ID showing his legal age (almost 18), but each time was searched for "anything illegal." Needless to say, he never had anything illegal in his possession. On the third occasion he let the pig know, firmly but politely, that he had had enough and considered their meetings as harassment. The pig said that since he had a tie-dye on every day and was always around campus he figured he had drugs or weapons. After that, the caller was never stopped again (This occurred in spring of '91).

Three callers were stopped and searched, the only reason given being that the police were

looking for a "Caucasian male between the ages of 18 and 24 with long black hair" on a warrant from Champaign (two cases) or Peoria (the other case) for armed robbery. None resulted in a bust, but one guy had to take his boots, socks, shirts and pants (to mid-thigh^o off on a sidewalk at two a.m. in January. That search took twenty minutes and involved five pigs and three squad cars. One of the other callers had long light brown hair.

--Matt Toczko

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We can laugh--with a bite--thanks to Michael Moore's new book, *Downsize This!* Moore, the creator of TV's provocative series, *TV Nation* and the popular documentary *Roger and Me* takes on the destruction of the middle class with a vengeance.

It's acceptable to blame government for all of our problems but no one names names of the corporate raiders making millions while decent jobs disappear. Moore not only names the corporate chieftains, he includes "trading cards" documenting their abuses (and their golf swing) and proposes we replace certain Congressfolks with the lobbyists who really control them.

If NAFTA was such a great deal Moore wonders why we don't move U.S. government offices to Tijuana and save taxpayers money. He also proposes building private prisons in former factories and then putting ex-employees who end up as criminals on their old jobs--as convict labor. And if profit is the supreme goal, why don't we allow GM to sell crack? Corporate leaders get the skewer but so does Newt Gingrich--"Mandate, What Mandate?" Moore slams Bill Clinton for not standing up for workers. The only political figure he goes soft for is Hillary Clinton in a chapter entitled, "My Forbidden Love for Hillary."

Union leaders are not immune to criticism as Moore lambastes them as too soft on corporations and too quick to make concessions. While attacking labor leadership he also wonders if members' inactivity is another reason union leaders are less militant.

The writing style is quick and breezy, almost like TV news clips. The humor is in-your-face, sharp and unsubtle. The closest literary precedent might be Abbie Hoffman's wild books in the 1960s.

MICHAEL MOORE

FROM THE CREATOR OF TV NATION & ROGER & ME

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If you like to laugh out loud when reading, grab this book. If you're offended by four letter words skip it. But if you've been frustrated by the controlled dialogue of most TV talking heads and the fact that no one will challenge the corporate pirates ruining the country (and the world), look this book up. You can get discouraged and cry--or you can laugh at the outrageousness of it all. And thanks to Michael Moore you'll be laughing--you might even join Mike's Militia by the book's end!

Downsize This! by Michael Moore
Crown Publishing, \$21, 288 pages
ISBN: 0-517-70739-X

--Mike Matejka
Livingston & McLean Counties Union News

Not In Our Town II

"Not In Our Town" is a familiar slogan in Bloomington-Normal, thanks to a year-long effort to encourage human tolerance. That local effort is featured in "Not In Our Town II" broadcast nationally on Public Broadcasting December 23.

WTVP-47, central Illinois PBS' affiliate, will broadcast "Not In Our Town II" at 9 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 23. The film looks at anti-intolerance efforts in Medford, Oregon, Kokomo, Indiana, Columbus, Ohio, and Bloomington-Normal.

The original "Not In Our Town," broadcast last year on PBS, featured the citizens of Billings, Montana, who worked together against a series of hate crimes.

Locally the story struck a chord, unleashing a series of events centered around the "Not In Our Town" theme.

Last year forums were held in December and January to discuss the Billings' effort and whether or not intolerance was a problem locally. Bloomington Police wore the "Not In Our Town" buttons and both Bloomington and Normal declared "Not In Our Town" weeks.

The effort continued throughout the year. In July a "Not In Our Town" anti-racism march from downtown Bloomington to Mt. Pisgah church renewed efforts. A real cross-section of the community participated. In August "Not In Our Town--No Racism" signs were posted at Bloomington's entrances to the City. In September two groups went to Mississippi to help rebuild burned churches.



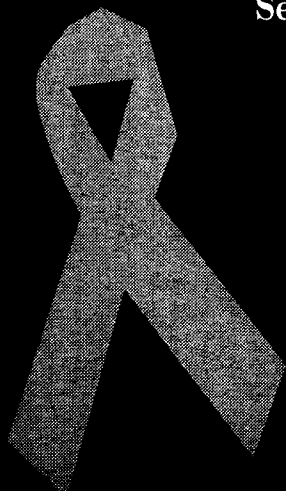
In January two more forums are planned, one for youth and one for adults, to discuss "Not In Our Town--One Year Later" and determine what progress the community has made and what problems remain unanswered.

The forums are tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 7 and 14th at the Old Courthouse Museum in downtown Bloomington. For more information on the planned forums, call 309-827-3934.

For more information on the national effort, call the California Working Group, 510-547-8484.

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Violet--Shifting the center

Including everything from music, book, magazine, art and record reviews to current and local events, VIOLET-SHIFTING THE CENTER, an informative, new newsletter to hit the scene, has it all with a feminist punch.

The creators are: Constance Best, Heather E. Sullivan and Jennifer Tsiakas, and in their own words VIOLET is: "A newsletter-Created for enlightenment with regards to issues of equality. It was created by three women, but every human being regardless of sex, race, age, religion, soci-economic background, or sexual orientation. It is for this reason that Violet's aim is to provide thought provoking and personal material and information that everyone will find some redeeming quality in. We hope to inspire thought, rather than hate. We promote peace and understanding with our efforts."

If VIOLET receives a good response in this area it will become a bi-monthly or quarterly newsletter, available for a dollar per issue. You can acquire a copy by writing VIOLET at: 701 S. Broadway, A2, Normal, IL. 61761, or by E-mailing them at: hesulli@acadcomp.cmp.ilstu.edu.

Aspiring writers and entrepreneuring advertisers are encouraged to inquire.

Excerpts from *The Preacher's Son*

The author Marc Adams writes that "*The Preacher's Son* is the story of my journey out of fundamentalist Christianity. It chronicles my life growing up gay as the son of a fundamentalist Baptist minister and continues through my attendance at and employment by Jerry Falwell's Liberty University."

Following is an excerpt:

I turned the blade at an angle and continued to scratch my right wrist until the skin turned white. This wrist, the one I had marked to bear the pain of my homosexuality, in and of itself, was enough for which to die. The cut I would make would deliver to me my freedom. there would be no more lies, no more ruined friendships, and no more shame.

The tears came again, and with them, a torrent of pain and anger. Those were the same emotions that shrouded my soul my entire life like a thick fog, muffling my happiness and ability to sustain peace,

No matter how much I wanted to, or how many times i ran the blade across my wrist, I could not bring myself to apply enough pressure to make me bleed. My desperation left me exhausted,

Defeated by my instinct to live, I laid in the field for another hour or so, letting my emotions heal and freeing my mind of the surge of negative thoughts that had brought me there. I believed then that God was there. Something always washed over my aching soul and healed me.

The Preacher's Son is available from Window Books, 8491 Sunset Blvd., Suite 172, West Hollywood, CA 90069-1911

ISU clericals await union vote

Secretaries and clericals--workers, usually women, at the office food chain's bottom. They keep the place humming, answer the phone, type the memos, file the reports and usually know more about what's happening than the boss.

They're also usually the lowest paid and often least appreciated workers.

Illinois State University clericals hope to change that situation, having recently filed with the American federation of State, County and Municipal employees (AFSCME) for union representation.

"We had no voice in decisions that affected us," said Julie Ruby, secretary for the History Department. "We are frequently discussed by the Administration behind closed doors with no one to represent us."

The clericals say they're falling behind in salary. Ruby cited single mothers working at ISU who were unable to support their children.

A single mother herself, she took a part-time job last spring at the Internal revenue Service center to make ends meet and was amazed to find many other ISU fellow workers there.

Ruby is quick to say the organizing campaign is not "anti-ISU. We all love working at ISU. But if ISU isn't going to take care of us, we have to take care of ourselves. It's the difference between collective begging and collective bargaining."

Rosanne Reid in the Health Sciences Dept. asked, "Why are clerical positions stereotyped as "pink collar?" Why do clerical workers seem invisible, without a voice?"

"We've got a lot of support," Ruby said. It's emotional; it's women's lives. Women are socialized not to stand up for themselves. It's a personal statement every time someone signs that union card." Issues the workers have identified include wages, benefits, and sick leave pay-out at retirement.

--Livingston & McLean Counties Union News

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Holiday

Part One: Thanksgiving

How is it that we celebrate the rape, death and destruction of a people and a continent and call it "Thanksgiving"? The Native Americans showed us kindness, and what did we do in return? Stole everything from them...their land, their hopes, their religion and their culture, and destroyed them as much as we could with poverty and disease. Then we helped build this nation with the sweat of slaves from Africa who were torn from their homes and families, and forced to work and "breed" for the "masters." When I think of those mothers whose children were taken from them, never to be seen again, I cry. The "land of the free." I feel deep shame at the history of "white people" on earth and in America, and at times of the color of my skin. This is closely tied to my feelings about the horrible abuses done to people throughout the world in the name of Christianity. If Christ is in heaven looking down on us, I'll bet he is really pissed at the way we have used his name to bring about the destruction throughout the world. And so, at our Orphan Thanksgiving celebration, I am the "hostess of doom." I remind people of what happened to this land and its people...what we have done here and all over the world. We should bear the shame and guilt. Our lives have been built upon this. We have our nice homes, cars, stereos as well as the waste, toxic pollution, etc., that is all our legacy of the last four hundred years. How many of us would be willing to turn over our

land back to the Native Americans it was stolen from? We can never atone for all that we have done, but I think our friends and children should be reminded of what the history of this country truly is so we can each do our part to pay tribute to these nameless people. Only then can we focus on what we have to be thankful for in our own lives, which is not "Thank God for this great nation and the first pilgrims." Remember that our lives truly are blessed. I like to have people say what they are the most thankful for before we eat...to publicly name that which has blessed each of our lives.

Thank you, Christopher...

I am seven years older than my brother and I started this tradition as a child with him. On Thanksgiving morning, before we went down for breakfast, he would come into my room and climb into bed with me and we would cuddle down under the covers and tell everything for which we were thankful. In my case it was especially important that he understand how much I loved him, and the happiness he brought to my life. As a child of divorced parents when divorce wasn't common, he was my first family that was and is always consistent in my life. He *meant* family to me at a time when I was being pulled by my mother to leave my father and stepmother and move in with her because she was lonely. He became the symbol of stability in my life, and of love,

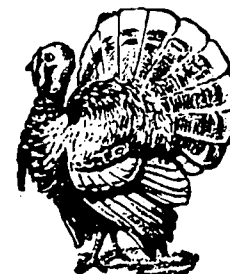
and of joy. I am still thankful all he brought to my life when he was born. And so now, on Thanksgiving morning, I cuddle in bed with my children and tell them the story of how Uncle Chris and I did this every year, and ask them what they are thankful for now.

Thank you, Mom...

for loving me when my own mother wouldn't. The path hasn't been easy, but we have both made it and survived. I think our journeys with our birth mothers were similar, making it a bit rough on us, but thank you for sticking with it. Few stepmothers would have done what you did.

Thank you, Dad...

for allowing the lies to be told in court so that she could have her divorce and you could get full custody of me. The lies were told, the games were played, and back in 1965 a man demanding custody of his 2 1/2 year old daughter was even rarer than the divorce. Everyone--the attorneys and the judge--knew what was going on, and you were granted custody. It took strength and courage to do what you did. Back then, in Peoria County, a divorce would only be granted for two reasons: adultery and abuse. I would like to set the record straight in writing...my father never hit or beat up my birth mother. But that was the lie that was told so he could end up with me. I was the winner.



Remember making tracings of your hands and drawing turkeys out of them? I also made turkey "tags" to go by each person's plate, and then would stuff a brown paper bag and make a turkey out of this to set in the middle of the table. It didn't strike me as odd back then as it does now. Why did we decorate with representations of the live creature that we were about to eat? We don't make stuffed pigs or cows to set in the middle of our tables before they are served. Why were we then not remembering to thank the turkey that unwillingly gave up its life so that we could gorge ourselves, or for that matter grandma who cooked it, instead of God as we always did? And where was God when it came time to clean up the mess afterwards?

Thank you, Mark...

for showing me that it really is never too late to have a happy childhood. The last 12 years of "playing" with you have more than made up for the childhood I never had. And thank you for Hannah and Keegan.

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Part Two: Christmas

I had a conversation with a woman a few weeks ago (I hardly ever get out, but it is always memorable!) who said THIS year she isn't buying Christmas presents for anyone she doesn't like. Of course I jumped on this one...why would you buy presents for anyone you don't like in the first place, I inquired. She made some comment about the people you feel like you have to buy for but don't really like...you know? No, I didn't know.

Little by little, my Christmas present list has narrowed. This year it has narrowed to our children and a few in the immediate family, and for the most part these are homemade. It seems to me that there is rarely anything our families need, or they would have it already, and the idea of giving a present should be a gift of love, and not of duty. We think that those things which we make with love are better than anything we could buy simply because of the "energy."

Granted, the mass marketing/consumerism of the holidays has become sickening. On the radio they are already talking of the anticipated profits from the holiday season. Remember when no Christmas decorations were up until after Thanksgiving? I still remember the excitement I felt about going to Bergner's to see the moving displays in the window and to speak with the Talking Christmas Tree! Three weeks ago I had to go into Target (my first venture into a store in ages) and was appalled to see the Christmas decorations already up with a new Christmas "slogan," *Harmonious Holidays*, and last weekend I discovered they aren't alone. How is it that people are still so obsessively buying without apparently noticing that their chains are being yanked by advertisers and businesses?

If I could give one gift to my children, it would be to not get caught up in the games of our society, and instead have them grow up and see the joy in life around them, and the beauty of simple living.

It is the time of year when I pull out my favorite Christmas button to pin onto my coat: "How dare you presume I'm Christian." What does Christmas celebrate anyway? The birth of the Son of God? It is actually the celebration of the return of the sun on the solstice, December 21. When the Christians were first trying to force their beliefs on the world, it was easiest and most convenient to take over the "pagan"



holidays and replace them with Christian ones, especially this one, which was so similar to the pagan story of the Goddess becoming pregnant with the Sun King at this time (which is the return of the light to the world). Mary bears the "Son of God" and the Goddess bears the "Sun King." This is not to say that Christ didn't really exist or that he wasn't the son of God (and didn't he say we were all children of God?) but what are the odds that his actual birth so perfectly coincided with a similar celebration already in place? And I don't want to burst your bubble, but Mary was no virgin.

It is wonderful to have a celebration of life and light in the middle of the darkest part of the year, to celebrate the wonders and the beauty of nature. Yule, Solstice, and Christmas. Even Hanukkah is a celebration of light (though it has nothing to do with the return of the sun/son). Yet why has this been reduced to money, profit and presents for people that aren't even necessarily liked? Why the "secret Santas" in offices everywhere? Could not the spirit of Christmas be more appropriately exemplified by the "secret adopting" of a social service agency or a poor family that needs food, coats or a roof over their heads? Why, in our society, do we thinking spending money is the most important symbol of how we feel? Do children really need hundreds of dollars worth of new toys each holiday season that they won't play with in a few months and are destined to be dropped off at Salvation Army if they don't fall apart first and end up in land fills?

We are teaching our children that love is symbolized not just by spending money, but by HOW MUCH money was spent. In the schools the kids can't wait to tell each other about all they things they got from "Santa" (who is a white man, in case you haven't thought about it lately) and see who got the best/most. We have somehow lost the pleasures of the season and the cycle of the year in a mountain of wrapping paper and plastic.

There is still magic and wonder around us everywhere, if we only take the time to find it, unleash it. During this holiday season remember the miracles of your childhood...the first snowfall; sledding followed by hot chocolate; lying awake on Christmas Eve trying to hear Santa on the roof; trying to find the two snowflakes that match...and ask yourself, "Where is the magic? Where is that child?"

--Marcee Murray



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Animal magnetism



Dalmatians damned

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and the Dalmatian Club of America are concerned that the Disney film *101 Dalmatians* will mean death for many Dalmatians.

Ingrid Newkirk, president of PETA, was quoted in an article in the *Pantagraph* as saying "It's going to wind up to be a real-life snuff film for Dalmatians. Every child in the audience is going to want one and a lot of parents will give into them." The concern is that these "impulse" or "fad" animals will then end up in shelters, where they are usually killed.

Of the pet stores contacted in the Bloomington-Normal and Peoria area Pass Pets at Eastland Mall in Bloomington is the only store that expects to increase the number of Dalmatians in its store. An employee of Pass Pets said that he expects to see more Dalmatian puppies in stock before Christmas "especially with the movie coming." He said that he can almost guarantee 100% that they will have several more in stock for the holidays.

If you know of anyone planning to buy an animal for a holiday gift please discourage them from this impulse buy. A companion animal is a life long commitment and the holidays are not a good time to introduce a new animal to ones home.

Sorting good toys from bad

With Christmas almost here some of you may be purchasing toys as gifts. PETA reminds us that:

Unbelievably, some toy manufacturers still test their toys on animals (and no, this doesn't mean a company lets dogs carry toys around in their mouths or play tag with them!). For example, in recent tests, a toy gun that shoots capsules of paint was shot at close range into the eyes of rabbits. Not only toys themselves, but the materials that go into them are force-fed in huge quantities to rabbits and rats. Painful tests on animals do nothing to protect young consumers who risk injury when using projectile-shooting toys. For this reason, several cities, including Chicago and Milwaukee, have considered legislation to ban toy guns that really shoot projectiles.

Some toys and novelty items actually glamorize, trivialize, and even promote animal abuse. Some examples include KickDog, a stuffed toy for kicking when you are mad; Bad Bug, a huge, plush bee children can "smash" with a rubber mallet; Krushed Kitty, a plush half-cat toy to hang from the trunk of a car or other "kitty krushing" place; and Earl the dead Cat, a stuffed toy promoted as "the last cat you'll ever need."

The Solution

Buy toys and games from companies like Kenner, Mattel, and Hasbro, that don't test their products on animals (you can write to PETA for a complete list). Choose toys that promote compassion for other species. **Animal Town**, P.O. Box 2002, Santa Barbara, CA 93120, 1-800-445-8642, has a mail-order catalog that includes the games "Dam Builders" and "Save the Whales." In the first, players are beavers who build dams and collect food supplies for winter while dealing with predators, including human ones; and in "Save the Whales," players work together to save marine mammals from oil spills, whaling ships, radioactive waste, and extinction.

Protest to the following companies that have refused to commit themselves to a ban on hurting and killing animals:

Fisher-Price, 636 Girard Avenue, East Aurora, NY 14052.

LJN Toys, Ltd., 3474 Clinton Avenue, South Plainfield, NJ 07080

Spearhead Industries, Inc., 9971 Valley View Road, Minnesota, MN 55344.

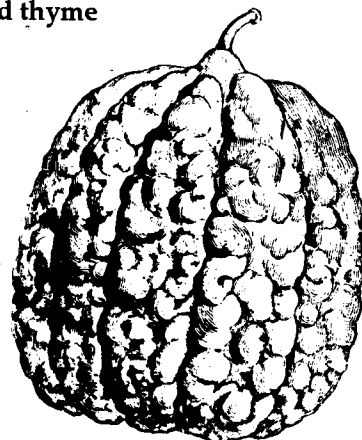
Complain to the managers of any local stores carrying novelties and toys that promote animal cruelty or denigrate the dignity of other-than-human beings; and write to the manufacturers of insulting toys and games.

--*Save the Animals!*: 101 Easy Things You Can Do

Stuffed acorn squash

Mildly sweet and savory, this eye-catching entree looks splendid on your holiday buffet table.

3 acorn squash, sliced in half, seeds removed
2 tablespoons (1/4 stick) margarine, melted
2 tablespoons olive oil or water
1 small onion, finely chopped
2 stalks celery, finely chopped
2 medium apples, peeled and finely chopped
1/4 cup pure maple syrup
1/2 cup raisins (optional)
1/4- 1/2 teaspoons each dried parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme



Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Brush the insides of the squash with the melted margarine and set aside.

Heat the olive oil or water in a medium frying pan over medium heat. Cook the onion, celery, and apple for about 8 minutes. Then add the maple syrup, raisins, herbs, salt, and pepper. Mix well.

In a large bowl, mix the cornbread stuffing and the vegetable mixture. Spoon into each squash half, cover with foil, and bake about 40 to 45 minutes, or until squash is tender. Serve with Chickenless gravy,

Serves 4 to 6.

Chickenless gravy

2 cups boiling water
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
3 tablespoons nutritional yeast
1 vegetable bouillon cube
1/2 cup dried fresh mushrooms
1/2 cup finely chopped onion
Onion salt to taste
Unbleached all-purpose flour

In a large saucepan, simmer all the ingredients except the flour for approximately 5 minutes. Slowly add the flour (tablespoon by tablespoon), whisking after each addition, until desired thickness is reached.

26 Animals die every minute in the U.S. alone...



to test new shampoos, hairsprays, laxatives, and oven cleaners



News from the McLean

"AIDS is God's curse . . .

. . . but not on homosexuals and drug addicts. It will be God's curse on them (those who could have stopped the plague but chose not to because the "right people" were dying). They will suffer for their lack of compassion and that Christian charity they bleat about, for they turn their faces from the afflicted. The terrible revenge will be when their children die of AIDS years from now."

--Rita Mae Brown

Violence support group for gay men

The McLean County AIDS Task Force will be the host of a new support group for any gay man who has been raped, abused, or has been involved in domestic violence, ages 18 and up. The group will meet at the MCATF office, 313 N. Main St. Bloomington each Saturday at 5:30 p.m. Contact Jade Monroe with questions at 827-2437. Leave contact information for a return call.

Holiday gift wrap fundraiser

Two holiday gift wraps are already planned as fundraisers for MCATF. The first is at B. Dalton Booksellers, Eastland Mall, on Saturday, December 7, from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The second is at Barnes and Noble Booksellers (by Schnuck's Supermarket) on Tuesday, December 10 from 5:00-10:00 p.m.

MCATF volunteers raised several hundred dollars at last year's gift wraps. This activity also puts the Task Force and AIDS in front of large numbers of people in a positive way. Contact Larry Fowler at 827-2437 to volunteer.

"Safer rides"

MCATF will again host a New Year's Eve Open House at its offices at 313 N. Main Street, downtown Bloomington. The Open House will start around 9:00 p.m. and will continue until we have provided "safer rides" home for those Bistro patrons who request them. This is a service we have been offering for several years as a small way to repay the continued generosity of the Bistro and its patrons.

We need volunteers with cars to be "designated drivers" to provide "safer rides" throughout the late evening.

Even if you can't take part in that program, do stop in for a while and share some refreshments and non-alcoholic drinks. It has always been an evening of fun for those who take part.

Happy New Year!

Mini-quilting bee

On Sunday, December 8 at 2:00 p.m., MCATF will host its second "mini-quilting bee" and tree-trimming party at the office.

Last year, several 12" x 18" panels were made from the materials we provided and some brought by the quilters. Come and join us again to make a small memorial to someone lost to HIV/AIDS. In addition to the panels, many other names were "remembered" on Red Ribbon tree decorations. Come this year to add the names of your loved one to this memorial.

New condoms free

MCATF has added two new products to the

barriers they already distribute.

The first is a female condom intended to be worn by women during sex. It can help prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. It consists of a soft, loose-fitting, polyurethane plastic pouch that lines the vagina. It has a soft ring at each end. The ring at the closed end is used to put the device inside the vagina and hold it in place. The other ring stays outside the vagina and partly covers the lip area. The manufacturer recommends that new users practice putting *Reality* in without having sex in order to become accustomed to its use.

We also have been able to obtain "vanilla" flavored condoms to fulfill the requests we have had for this item. MCATF recognizes that oral sex without a barrier carries a risk of HIV transmission and recommends those choosing this activity use an appropriate barrier.

MCATF offers training information on the correct use of barriers for HIV prevention. This training is available by phone or in person at our office.

As a service to the community, MCATF has distributed various types of condoms free to those who want them for several years now. Although we do not charge for these items, we gratefully accept donations to help defray the cost of providing them.

Wish list for clients

--One client has requested financial assistance for veterinary fees for a cat, to include neutering, declawing, worming, etc. We know that pets keep people healthy. Please consider this as a designated donation.

--Consider holiday gifts for one or more of our dozen or so clients, such as gift certificates from a local supermarket or department store.

--Holiday cards, poinsettias, other flowers (we'll get them there)

--Sweat suits, socks

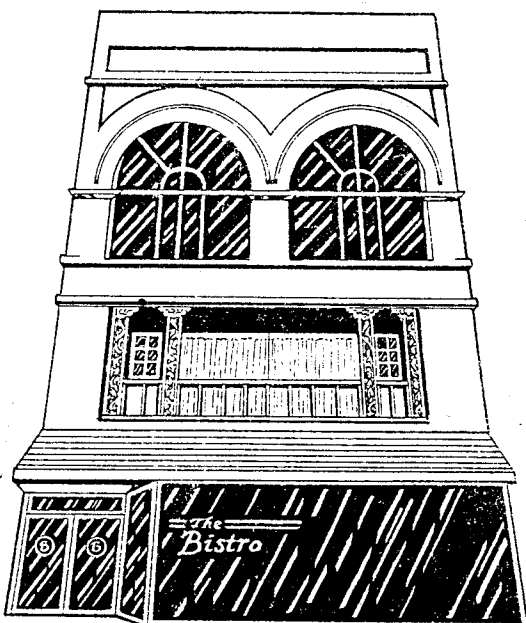
--Please consider a gift of non-perishable food and/or household products to our client food bank. We particularly need canned meats, fruits and vegetables. So far, we have placed no restrictions on drawing from the food bank except for HIV sero-positive status.

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County AIDS Task Force

Winter training schedule

The following training sessions are being announced for the fall/winter months. Please consider attending those you have not taken so that you can expand your volunteer choices with the Task Force. All training sessions are held at the MCATF office, 313 N. Main St., Bloomington, and are free unless indicated otherwise.

Orientation to the Task Force (unfortunately there are none in December) is on Tuesday, January 28, at 7p.m. and Tuesday, February 25, at 7p.m.

Learn about MCATF, its mission and its volunteer opportunities. One sessions does it all! Open to MCATF members and the general public. There is no fee for this training session and although pre-registration is suggested, it is not required.

MCATF general meeting

(Dec. 5, Jan. 2, & Feb. 7) MCATF holds a meeting of its general membership on the first Thursday of every month at 6 p.m. The general meeting is held at the First of America Bank's downstairs meeting room, 202 E. Washington St., Bloomington, unless announced otherwise. These meetings are free and open to the public.

OSF "beyond grief" support group

This group meets bimonthly, on the first and third Thursdays of each month, from 5:30-7p.m.

(This is a general grief group and not HIV related.) The meetings are held in the Business & Conference Center, St. Joseph Medical

Center, Bloomington. The meetings are free and open to the public. Sponsored by St. Joseph Pastoral Care Department, (309) 662-3311, ext. 1059.

Parents, families, and friends of lesbians and gays (PFLAG)

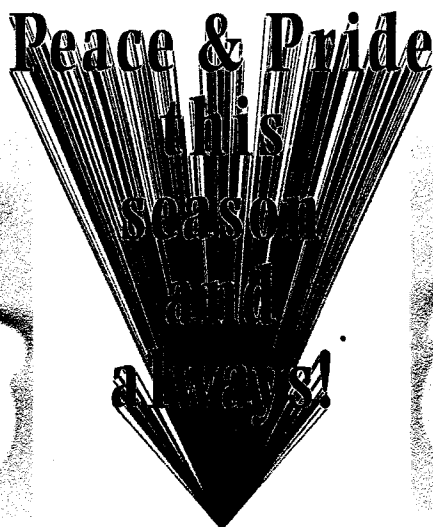
(Nov. 19, Dec. 17, Jan. 21, & Feb. 18) PFLAG meets the third Thursday of each month from 7-8:30p.m. They provide education and support for families and friends and advocate to end homophobia. Meetings are held in the "Yoke" room, First United Methodist Church, 211 N. School St., Normal. Contact Carol Cadonic, (309)663-0831 or write PFLAG, PO Box 615, Bloomington, IL 61702-0615.

--from Red Ribbon Review, the McLean County AIDS Task Force Newsletter



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Murder in the family: The rights and needs

There is nothing more devastating than the horrifying news that a family member has been murdered. Numbing shock, disbelief and emptiness often give way to feelings of violent anger, a thirst for revenge, and deep despair. When someone we love dies naturally, we experience some similar feelings, but eventually we reach a place of acceptance. We grieve, then one day we find that our most painful memories have been transformed into cherished possessions. We look fondly at photos of shared moments and are grateful for the time we had with the one we lost. We laugh as we recall good times and derive pleasure from talking about the departed family member.

Murder is different. When someone we love has been killed, rather than grieve, we blame. We blame because there is another person responsible for our loss, whose actions caused our pain. Hating that person feels good, because by focusing our attention on that person, we avoid dealing with our feelings of grief. We also avoid the acceptance, healing and closure we so desperately need. The result is that we remain stuck in the time and place in which the crime occurred and never move beyond it. We stop living, and because of this yet another life is murdered. We are unaware that the hatred in which we take comfort is destroying us. If we are to reclaim our lives, we must let go of hate, redirect our energies and rebuild our lives. By refusing to respond to violence with violence, we find peace and honor the memories of our lost loved ones.

Well-meaning people who have not themselves been touched by violent crime often assume they know what victims' families need. They believe families want to inflict as much pain as possible on the person whose actions deeply injured them. This belief puts expectations on families; those who reject the solution of vengeance are seen as saints, or as people who did not care much about the victim. But victims' families have needs that can never be met by a quest for vengeance. Victims' families have the right to express their feelings in a nonjudgemental atmosphere without being exploited.

I once attended a meeting of a victims' assistance program operated by a prosecutor's office. A woman was there who had recently lost her son to murder. When she expressed sorrow for the mother of the young man who had killed her son, she was quickly told that if the offender's mother had been a *good* mother,

her son would not have committed such a crime. It was apparent that this grieving woman had violated some unspoken rule of conduct. She became apologetic, then fell silent as if she had betrayed her son by feeling compassion for another distraught mother.

Too often groups established to help victims' families are not equipped to help them work through their trauma. Some of these groups lead vulnerable families to choices and actions they would not have made on their own without the "aid" of these groups.

Victims have a right to a caring community prepared to help them through the confusion and anger that follow a murder. For many years I belonged to a group in Syracuse, N.Y., that held monthly vigils opposing the death penalty. During that time a teenaged girl was kidnapped, tortured and finally murdered by several men. Their motive was to force her into prostitution, and the case received front page coverage. One day during a vigil the girl's mother set up a table beside us. On it she displayed her daughter's picture and news clippings giving graphic details of the murder. She was accompanied by a strong proponent of the death penalty. I approached her, introduced myself and expressed sorrow at her loss. I told her that my father's brother had been killed years earlier, and explained that our opposition to the death penalty did not mean that we favored offenders over victims. We discussed victims' programs that our group advocated. I emphasized that we opposed all killing, and that while we couldn't control killing by individuals, killing by the state was done on behalf of us all. That was why we protested it. The woman seemed nervous, but grateful that I had gone over to talk with her.

Soon the press arrived and asked us both to participate in an interview. After I answered a couple of routine questions, the reporter turned to the mother of the murdered girl and said, "And you favor the death penalty?" "I used to," she responded, "but I've changed my mind." I had made no attempt to change her mind, but had simply expressed concern for her feelings. That she so quickly and easily changed her position indicated to me that she had never had an opportunity to work through her feelings of form her own opinion about what kind of punishment she truly preferred. Instead, she had been befriended by people with their own interests at stake, who manipulated and used her when she was still in trauma.

We must offer victims' families more than another death in response to their loss resulting from violence. The focus on the healing of the family, rather than on revenge, can best be provided by churches and other organizations with nothing personal to gain from the outcome.

Victims' families have rights. They have the right to answers. Why did this happen? What kind of person did this thing? Families are tormented by the need to ask very hard questions. The sad truth is that persons who kill often don't know the answers. As a society we all share some of the responsibility for the conditions that lead to violence. We have created a world in which violence is accepted, even glorified. But then we are outraged when someone kills. Families have a right to expect that offenders will take responsibility for their actions. But we too must examine the messages we send and the world we have created and accept responsibility for the results.

Victims' families have a right to the timely resolution of violent crimes. When a family has endured a painful trial during which they have had to relive the details of the death of a child, a parent, a sibling, a spouse or other close relative, they expect closure will come when the trial ends. If the offender is sentenced to a prison term, that sentence begins immediately. At this point families can begin to put their lives back together. If the sentence is death, the family begins a long wait for that sentence to be carried out. They can wait for years, as the appeals process moves slowly. It must be slow in order to ensure fairness and certainty of guilt. When a new trial is granted, the entire painful process of the first trial is repeated. The waiting then continues and the family feels cheated and betrayed by the system. Some feel cheated even when an execution takes place.

Several states now allow victims' families to witness executions, in the belief that it will give them closure. However, many family members come away feeling that execution was not enough. The sole object of their attention for many years is now gone, and they begin to entertain fantasies about what tortures should have been inflicted on the offender who in many cases died more easily than the victim. The sad reality is that vengeance is like a drug--getting it creates the need for more.

After the electrocution of Ted Bundy in Florida in 1989, the mother of one of the women he





of victims

killed was quoted as saying she had waited ten years for him to die, and she did not feel better. "An eye for an eye," implies restitution. Death gives nothing back. rather, it leaves victims' families feeling they have been given nothing but false promises.

Victims have a right to feel safe. When a family has lost someone to murder, their feelings of safety are shattered. Violence is no longer something that enters their homes on the evening news; it is in their midst. When an offender is sent to prison many victims fear that one day he or she will be released or escape and hurt someone else. I once believed that most people who favored the death penalty did so because of a desire for vengeance. What I have found is that many accept it reluctantly because they fear the offender will kill again. They want to spare others from suffering what they have suffered. Their concern is genuine and valid.

In most prisons men and women are simply warehoused. Medical problems, addictions, emotional and psychiatric disorders resulting from childhood neglect and abuse, as well as other causes of violent behavior are never even diagnosed, let alone treated. Is it any wonder so many people are released from prison more violent than when they went in? It has been documented that those who serve long prison terms return to prison in great numbers. Oddly, the response to this fact has been to lock people up for even longer periods of time--as if additional years of ineffective rehabilitation will somehow bring about positive change. If ten years behind bars results in a person becoming more violent, why do we assume that fifteen or twenty will have the opposite effect? It is not how long a person will be incarcerated that should concern us, but what will take place during that time.

Current methods of dealing with crime do far more to perpetuate it than to deter it. Building more prisons, locking more people up for longer periods of time, and executing human beings cost millions of dollars that should be spent on correcting the conditions that cause crime. Focusing on prevention, rather than imposing harsher punishments after a crime has been committed, is something that everyone could support. Instituting programs that teach prisoners new ways to deal with conflict would reduce recidivism. Determining the root causes of violence and working to reduce them are the most effective and humane responses to crime. Implementing restorative measures that would effect positive changes in our society would significantly reduce the number of victims and benefit us all.

Pat Bane is executive director of Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation. She has also been on the board of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. She and her family live in Virginia.

For more information contact: Murder Victims' Families For Reconciliation; P.O. Box #208; Atlantic, VA 23303-0208; (804)-824-0948

Notes from the land of anti-fat

Dexfen Redux

Months after the drug's promotion in mainstream media as the new medication of choice in the Fight Against Obesity, the Food and Drug Administration has requested that the manufacturers of Redux (otherwise known as dexfenfluramine) update its labeling to inform doctors and patients about its link to primary pulmonary hypertension, a life-threatening lung disorder.

That it took so long for the FDA to even make this recommendation speaks to both the power of the diet industry as well as our culture's fat phobia. Dexfen's connection to pulmonary hypertension, a disease with a fatality rate that approaches 100%, has been known since its inception, though early reports tend to downplay this link. Current FDA estimates place the risk of contracting hypertension at 46 cases per million patients.

Odds still don't look that bad, do they? There's only one problem with these figures.

This minuscule estimate is based on a European study where only 1% of the patients had used the drug over a year. In its haste to get this moneymaking drug on the market, redux's manufacturers don't have any long-term statistics. Look more closely at that one percent, however, and the stats become scarier.

According to one testimony at the FDA's hearing on the drug, this one percent made up 15% of the cases of PPH. No one knows what the effects of, say, five years of Redux will have on the PPH figures, but we do know one thing: redux is a lifetime drug - soon as the patient stops taking it, they regain their lost weight.

According to Paul Ernsberger, of the Council on Size and Weight Discrimination, the FDA's guesstimated figures could be substantially higher; PPH is not a readily diagnosed illness because its incidence in the past has been so rare. "For the case of salmonella poisoning," Ernsberger notes, "a study by the CDC found the ratio of officially reported cases to actual cases is 1 in 1,000. Given the difficulty in diagnosing pulmonary hypertension, this ratio could be even higher."

The FDA justifies its earlier decision to approve dexfen by stating that "the drug's benefits outweigh the risks when used in the appropriate population." Because fatness itself is seen as a life-threatening illness, the medical community has essentially been given free-rein to use fat patients as guinea pigs. What is the "appropriate population"? In FDA terms, it's anyone classified as morbidly obese (at least 20% over their "ideal weight"), though no mechanism exists to prevent anyone smaller from getting their doctor to write a prescription for dexfen.

Since its approval in June, there have been almost 500,000 prescriptions written for Redux. It stands to make \$1 billion for its manufacturer, Interneuron Pharmaceuticals. There's big money to be made in fat phobia.

Recently, the New England Journal of Medicine had to qualify a favorable editorial written by two obesity researches about Redux when it was discovered that both authors had economic ties to the drug's manufacturers. Sound like something out of the movie version of The Fugitive? According to Sally Smith, Executive Director of National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), this is business as usual: many obesity researchers typically fail to disclose their ties to the diet and drug industries.

"It's about time," Smith notes, "that the spotlight was turned on the incestuous relationship between obesity researchers and drug manufacturers. Perhaps now the media and public interpretation of their adamant pronouncements that fatness must be treated with weight loss products, drugs and surgery will be balanced with the knowledge of their potential for economic gain."

For too long the medical community has concentrated on weight loss while ignoring the need to help fat adults become healthier as they are. The current dexfen debacle is a prime example of this mindset at work. The biggest irony lies in the fact that every patient who dies as a result of dexfen will be labeled "dead from obesity" - and not from the medical industry that exploited them.

--billsher

[Information for the above came from the NAAFA Newsletter as well as the online Fat Acceptance Newsgroup - "soc.support.fat-acceptance."]





Drug laws as cultural lobotomy

Society advances, in Karl Popper's phrase, by a process of "trial and the elimination of error." Hindering either of these two steps in the name of cost-cutting or risk-aversion does not hamper the commission of error, merely the elimination or error. It disconnects the ratchet of social progress.

For example, the backfiring of the attempt through regulation and tort law to produce a risk-free society is becoming increasingly clear. Had heavier-than-air flight been made even heavier with detailed regulation after the first plane crash, we would not have developed a means of long-distance transportation far safer than any alternative. Transportation would be costlier and riskier, but ten thousand back-page car crashes don't have the impact of one front-page plane crash. In innumerable areas of life, safety-at-any-price exacts a high price not only in dollars, but also in safety.

The same analysis applies to drugs. Illegal drug "experiments" go on constantly, but we can learn little of or from the good or bad experiences of drug users, since they may be arrested if they talk about them. Celebrities thus arrested may be able to escape prison if they agree to go on the lecture circuit and recant their heresy. In this, our sole advance over the Inquisition is that heretics do not need to be shown the instruments of torture; viz., prison and the press. In any case, the resultant testimony can hardly be considered reliable.

Drug companies have no incentive to invest in developing safer psycho-therapeutic or "recreational" drugs, since these would simply be outlawed. The government's hostility to safe drugs was noted by Durk Pearson and Sandy Shaw in *Life Extension: the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms* "forbid the addition of anti-oxidant vitamins such as B-1 to booze, although medical experts... agree [it] would significantly reduce alcohol-induced brain and liver damage." An even better solution, they note, "would be to develop new recreational drugs which provide the desired alcohol high without the damaging side effects. There is, in fact, such a drug. [It has already been tested, but it] is not FDA approved, and it is not likely to be approved in the foreseeable future."

Likewise, the prescription drug diphenylhydantoin "has been used successfully to allow smokers to quit without withdrawal symptoms," but of course, it is not FDA approved for that purpose. "in fact," noted Pearson and Shaw, "since smoking is not a disease, the FDA may never approve any treatment, no matter how safe, specifically for the purpose of stopping smoking."

This show of concern for the health of even legal recreational drug users is no less that we could expect from those wonderful folks who let thousands of AIDS and other patients die while awaiting the nirvana of the perfectly effective drug, and the chimera of the perfectly safe one. These examples of costs imposed as savings, of danger and death imposed as safety, could be - and still are - multiplied ad infinitum.

The blinding success of drug laws

In particular, the law "protects" us from the effects, both maleficent and beneficent, of coca and cocaine, amphetamines, psychedelic drugs, and cannabis (a legal medicine until 1937). But as Lester Ginspoon and James B. Bakalar, both of Harvard Medical School, note in the Pacific Institute's anthology *Dealing With Drugs*, all of these have medicinal uses.

To take one example, as recently as 1985, psychotherapists from around the country offered the DEA testimony to the therapeutic efficacy of MDMA, a mild, then-legal psychedelic drug. (The term "psychedelic" may be misleading; MDMA - unlike alcohol - does not cause hallucinations, even in substantial overdoses.) The drug, they said, vastly increased the very bases of therapy: motivation, empathy, and depth and extent of communication. Dissolving the fear or embarrassment or inertia associated with new self-insight, the drug helped to break through the sticking points of therapy. Success stories abounded: a woman who was the victim of rape and torture and was still suicidal after six months of ordinary therapy was able to face the past and begin living a normal life again. The positive mental attitude it helped encourage seems to have aided another woman's remission from an otherwise fatal cancer. And so on. Disastrously, however, the drug was nicknamed "Ecstasy," a term so reeking of hedonistic heresy that no product could bear the name and not be outlawed, not even dog food or suppositories.

The medical case for marijuana is even clearer, to the point where even the government can't deny its efficacy in treating nausea, glaucoma, and other conditions.

Rick Morris, a truck driver in Tennessee, lost three-eighths of his body weight while on nauseating chemotherapy. Like many chemotherapy patients, until Morris began smoking marijuana, even the smell of food would cause him to vomit, his attorney said.

Attorney? Oh, yes, Morris was convicted in 1988 of possession of marijuana.

Two million Americans suffer the progressive eye disease of glaucoma. An eighth of those have serious vision impairment already, and 7,500 people a year go blind from it. In 1972, Robert C. Randall, aged 24, was told he had glaucoma and could expect to be totally blind in three to five years. He found by chance that smoking marijuana completely restored his eyesight and arrested the progress of his ailment. When he grew these medicinal plants, it was he himself who was arrested. Naively, he called federal drug bureaucrats to get permission to use marijuana as medicine - and found they already knew of its unique value in treating glaucoma, and never bothered to tell the public. After tremendous battles, he won the right to use marijuana (supplied from Uncle Sam's Mississippi pot farm), which the bureaucrats tried to make subject to Randall's conceding to keep quiet about it. He

refused to accede to this, and they capitulated. But later the "liberal" Carter White House drug policy chief, Dr. Peter Bourne, threatened to cut off Randall's marijuana supply because he insisted on appearing in the press, telling people the truth about this medicine. In effect, the government repeatedly threatened to blind Randall if he didn't keep his mouth shut.

People are still going blind not because marijuana laws cut off the supply of the drug (tens of millions of people use it, after all), but because they cut off the supply of information. Glaucoma, cancer, and other patients have had to discover this information independently (and criminally). Or not discover it, and go blind or starve to death in retching agony, which all of them would have done if drug laws had been "successful". These millions of Americans remain, if effect, victims of a gigantic Tuskegee experiment (an experiment in which black males were intentionally denied medical treatment for syphilis for purposes of studying the disease).

The procrustean moral calculus

Prohibitionists are starting to concede that their policy has costs. Morton Kondracke, writing in *The New Republic*, offers a typical interventionist analysis: he estimates the cost of the drug war at a paltry \$30 billion - a third of that for direct enforcement, two-thirds for the cost of crime generated by heroin addicts. But this sort of cost/benefit analysis fudges entries on both sides of the ledger, by techniques including these:

(1) Ignoring the costs of the "Tuskegee experiment" above.

(2) Aggregating costs imposed by people on themselves with costs imposed by people on others. Every life counts the same in this Procrustean moral calculus, the consenting and unconsenting alike.

Consider what the interventionist does when he cites "productivity loss" as a cost of drugs. If Joe Would-Be-Cokehead were not producing anything in the first place, then his self destruction would have "zero cost". Thus Joe's very productivity is perversely used as an argument for curtailing his liberty. This approach would argue that if Charles Krauthammer could make more money as a doctor than a political writer, the law should force him to do so. This leaves us with the one real social cost: accidents, primarily driving under the influence by a small, irresponsible minority of drinkers and other drug users. The idea that we should round up all drug users because of this sounds suspiciously like "There is no such thing as an innocent suspect." Surely this is better dealt with by diverting \$10 billion a year worth of zealous narcotics officers into traffic patrols than by attempting preventive detention of all of society.

(3) Ignoring damage to other constitutional rights. When the government can blind its critics lawfully, the First Amendment is a mockery. When the government confiscates putative drug profits (including money intended



for attorney's fees) in a "civil" proceeding, due process is mocked, as is effective assistance of counsel. Increasingly obtrusive searches are rubber-stamped in the name of the drug war. Penalties for marijuana sales have often grossly exceeded commonly given penalties for murder. And the list goes on. War is the health of the state, and the drug war is no exception.

(4) Ignoring psychic benefits. The feelings of would-be drug users are given no weight in this scheme, although they are willing to part with money to alter their feelings. This is like saying that one who survived an involuntary game of Russian Roulette had zero loss and one who survived psychotherapy had zero gain. In fact, the psychic benefits of some drugs may be far more than the mere physical pleasure of, say, cocaine.

One of the objections to drugs is that they "cause" some people to lose control over their lives. But in most such cases, I submit, drugs, legal or illegal, are simply the means by which a person carries out his early-life programming for self-destruction. The "cure" is not the removal of a few of many available means to that end, but the teaching of the victim how to change his own programming - i.e., how to be an autonomous human being instead of a robot. Ironically, there is, as noted above, strong evidence that some illegal drugs would be good for precisely that psychotherapeutic purpose. For vast numbers of responsible would-be users, also includes the new science of chaos theory, which has been applied to the study of cardiac arrhythmia, Parkinson's disease, and similar medical abnormalities.

The hardware and software developed to animate sequences in the Star Wars movies have been adapted for computer-aided design and medical imaging applications. It's a shame radiology departments don't have signs rubbing this in, but the first people whose lives were saved by this technology can thank George Lucas and his fans.

If science fiction has yielded medical spinoffs, it defies credibility that recreational drug research would fail to do likewise.

We can already point to the accidental discovery of marijuana's value fighting nausea and glaucoma. In fact, we can even name one of its non-medical spinoffs: many utilitarian products can be made from the marijuana plant, including an inexpensive, high-grade paper that is far more long-lasting than acid-treated wood pulp. thus the specific form of cultural brain damage that occurs as many old books disintegrate is one of the continuing legacies of the drug war.

A free society's complex web of information and innovation is one with which we tamper at our peril.

Inventing danger

The reason our culture has evolved the custom of freedom and the concept of individual rights is that in the long run, they work. And the reason they have developed so slowly is that any zealot, well-meaning but without understanding, can point to the short run.

Here, in the realm of invention, is the paradigm of the mechanism and value of freedom. Very few people personally utilize the right to invent, and in the short run, some people are "harmed" by invention to the extent



of having to change employment. Despite these two factors, we not only let people invent things - we encourage them. We sort out the results in the most callous manner: if they hit the jackpot, we get to use the invention without having taken their risks. If their experiments then, drug laws are not aiding but obstructing self-control.

(5) Ignoring spinoffs. Only when drugs are legal can they give rise to spinoffs benefiting non-users. This is the biggest cost of all, meriting separate discussion.

Spinoffs

The entire advance of civilization is a web of "spinoffs", intricately and unpredictably related. Cut off a strand of inquiry, narrow the range of allowable personal experiments, and the damage to the web grows exponentially with time - and in ways we cannot predict. Thus Friedrich Hayek writes in The Constitution of Liberty, "We shall never get the benefits of freedom, never obtain those unforeseeable new developments for which it provides the opportunity, if it is not also granted where the uses made of it by some do not seem desirable. It is therefore no argument against individual freedom that it is frequently abused."

Let us look at a business analogous to the recreational drug trade: the entertainment industry. If any business could be hamstrung without impairing progress, surely it is this. Let's say, arguendo, that "freedom of entertainment" has been grossly abused - that 99% of entertainment dollars have gone for mindless rubbish. But let's see what those dollars have financed.

Audiophiles financed the development of magnetic tape, later used in computers; diskettes and hard discs spun off that. The

quarters plunked into early video games helped finance Silicon Valley. From the money consumers spent on laser discs there arose CD-Rom storage, which even small bookstores use for instant computer access to Books in Print. Couch potatoes in the '50s buying TVs to watch I Love Lucy helped make it possible for millions to have high-quality, inexpensive computer monitors today.

Thus entertainment spinoffs accelerated all advances based on computers. This includes artificial intelligence, whose applications include medical expert systems, aiding doctors with faster and more accurate diagnoses. It fail, well, tough for them.

This is the model for the discovery, diffusion, and utilization of knowledge in a free society.

Of course drug use has risks and costs, but only those to bystanders should be curtailed by law. Anything more done to the "social organism" - any laws and silence and lies - is not an immune response, but a jolt of curare, a routing to oblivion of the cultural neurons bearing information on which drug use is beneficial and which harmful.

This cultural lobotomy is a cost we should insist be included in the accounting when next the drug warriors trot out their moral calculators.

The late John Dentinger was a free-lance writer and libertarian.

Call the Central Illinois Libertarians at 309-452-1219.

--John Dentinger



Mental illness awareness

How should one behave towards a person with schizophrenia?

Sometimes you may feel you are walking on broken glass when your relative or someone you know is having a particularly difficult time. At that time you may have to summon up all your energy so that you can maintain their trust while at the same time maintaining equilibrium at home. Here are some ideas to help you achieve that goal. Many of these behaviors should also be adopted by the general public.

- be friendly
- be accepting
- be encouraging
- make time to listen
- include them
- treat them with respect

Avoid the following:

- being patronizing
- being critical
- pushing them into situations they are not comfortable with
- being gloomy
- arguing with them or others while they are present
- giving them a lecture or talking too much
- getting yourself into difficult situations with them

Sooner or later when a person has Sz a crisis will occur. When this happens there are some things you can do to reduce or avoid the potential for disaster:

- remember that you cannot reason with acute psychosis
- remember that the person may be terrified by their feelings of loss of control
- do not express irritation or anger
- don't shout
- don't use sarcasm as a weapon
- decrease distractions: turn off TV, radio, dishwasher, etc.

- ask any casual visitors to leave the room; the fewer people the better
- avoid direct continuous eye contact
- avoid touching the person
- sit down and ask the person to sit down also.

Holiday time

I dread holiday times when families are all supposed to get together, eat and drink and generally enjoy each other's company. For me, times like these bring back feelings of disappointment, resentment, sadness and a whole host of other emotions. Christmas, for example, has not been a good time for me or the family for many years. There were times my brother was in the hospital, times he was home but barely stable, times he had to be taken to the hospital during the holiday, times the police came.

If I dread it, what does it mean to him? When

he thinks a lot is expected of him, he usually handles it well for a few hours, but after that he crashes? - I mean he retreats to his inner self, or he gets extremely agitated. Last year each visiting family member took my brother aside for a mini-visit, a one on one chat and that seemed to work a little. At least he knew everyone cared. But when it came to the big dinner he disappeared to his room. He just cannot process a lot of noise, people, snatches of conversation-it's just too much for him.

When people move

Often, a relative or friend will move or change circumstances in some way without telling anyone. Social workers and other MI professionals are inclined to tell parents to "Let him take responsibility for doing this," or "It will be a learning experience for her." This type of advice indicates to us that many in the helping professions do not understand the nature of schizophrenia. Our advice differs.

We know from experience that many persons with Sz are often unable to take responsibility for telling others about such matters. If we leave them to do so we are likely to end up dealing with a complicated mess that will have to be sorted out when the consequences of his lack of action come about. Examples are: pension/social assistance check fails to arrive and the person is cut off from benefits; bank communication, bills, etc are not received and not paid. Rent is neglected; premises are left uncleaned, possessions are left behind.

Our advice is to look after these matters if you suspect your friend/relative won't. People like to feel that they control their lives. Sometimes it is difficult to persuade someone with Sz to do what is best for them. Thus it is useful to offer a choice.

"Will you take a walk now or after lunch," might be a way to suggest a walk, a shower, or any activity you may feel useful or enjoyable. People with Sz often have feelings that change very frequently, so that what someone may refuse to do one moment may agree to do later in the day/week.

Time to order your NARSAD Christmas cards

Anne Olsen has a selection of new NARSAD cards for all occasions and a selection of 1995 Christmas Cards that can be ordered. The NARSAD cards are creations by persons with neuro biological brain disorders. On each card is an educational message about mental illness. Every NARSAD card sold produces revenue for research on schizophrenia and depression and payment to the artist. Most boxes of cards are \$5. Call Anne Olsen at 309-454-4983.

Volunteers Needed

As a money raising effort, Barnes & Noble Book Store has given us the privilege to wrap gifts in their store on Tuesday, Dec. 17. We will be their gift wrappers that day from 10:00 am until 9:00 pm, so if there is an hour or two within that period that you can work, please call Anne Olsen at 309-454-4983. According to DMD group, it's fun as well as profitable.

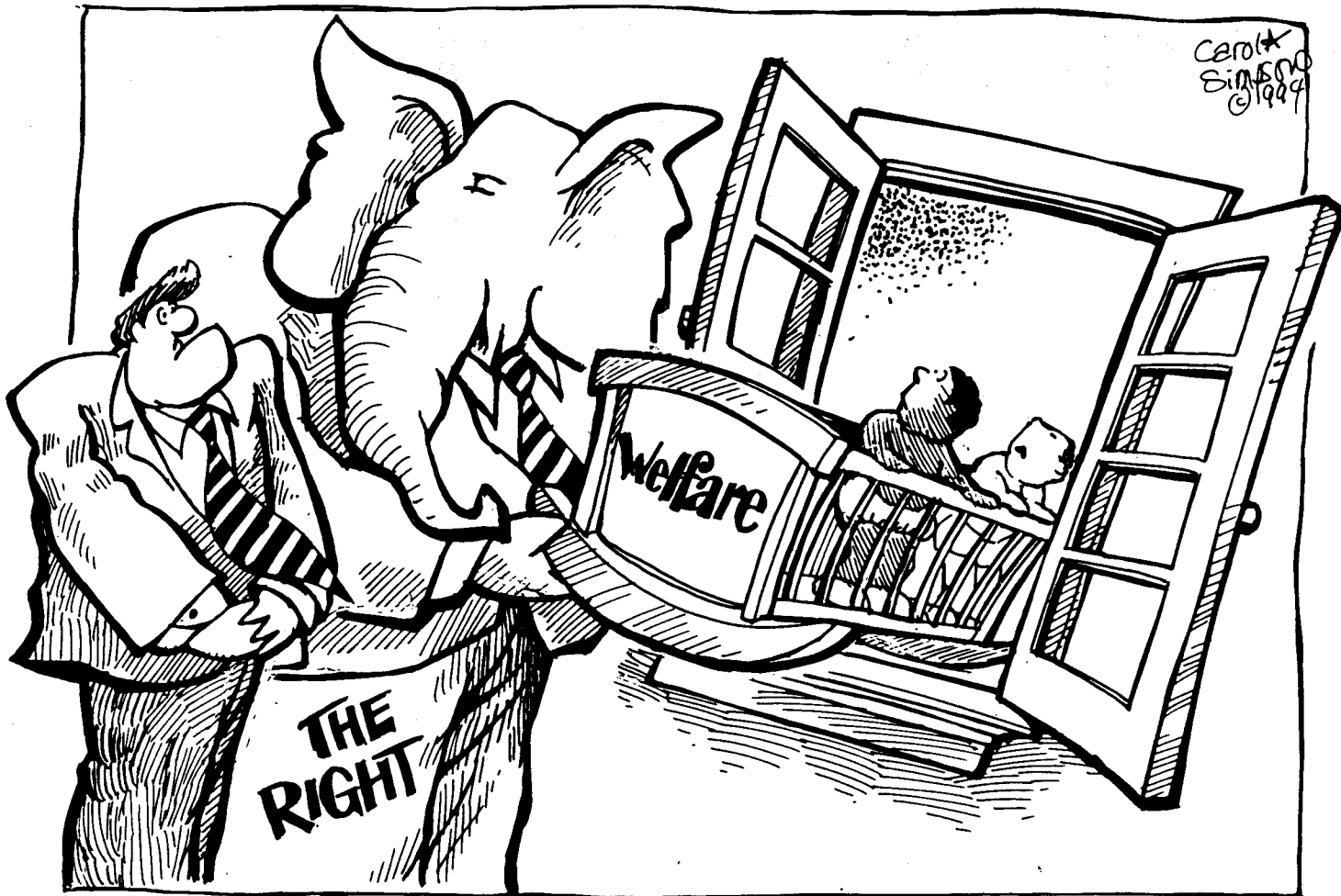
--AMI of McLean and Livingston Counties

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"Just close your eyes and I'll make the whole problem disappear."

Road signs

--Number of the 9,553 electronic surveillance requests by the FBI in the past ten years that related to arson, bombing or firearms: 19. [Nadine Strossen, ACLU]

--Number of wiretap requests turned down by federal judges since 1988: None. [Scripps-Howard]

--Amount Milwaukee County WI spent in 1988 to fight the effects of poverty: \$1 billion. Income to a three-member low-income family if this money had been converted into a direct payment: \$33,379. [The Neighborhood Works]

--Annual cost of UN and its peacekeeping for each US citizen: less than \$4. [Bulletin of Atomic Scientists]

--Number of Iraqi children who have died as a result of international sanctions: 500,000. [Lancet]

--Amount the government spends per death on three diseases, each killing 40,000-46,000 people a year. Breast cancer: \$11,500. Prostate cancer: \$2,000. AIDS: \$40,000. [Penthouse]

--Percent of two million phone calls intercepted in 1995 that were relevant to criminal prosecutions: 18%. [Electronic Privacy Information Center]

--Drop in drug use by those youth involved in Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs compared with those that aren't: 46% [Center for Substance Abuse Research]

--Amount Wisconsin spends on cash welfare payments to the poor each year: \$300 million. Amount it spends on tax breaks for big business each year \$1.1 billion. Amount it will subsidize a new Milwaukee Brewer's stadium: \$160 million. [Ralph Nader]

--Amount Gap pays El Salvadorian teenage girls to make T-shirts: 16 cents a shirt. Hours worked per day: 18 [Rainbow Coalition]

--Number of new housing units that could be provided in US if just one accessory flat was added for each 1,000 homes: 48,000 [Planning consultant Patrick Hare, Washington DC]

--The Progressive Review

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News From Voice

RU-486 update

The FDA has given RU-486 all but final approval. As long as the product is labeled and manufactured to meet agency standards the drug could be on the market by summer.

Just a few years ago it looked like American women might never gain access to RU-486. It has been available in Europe since 1988, but the French manufacturer, Roussel Uclaf, fearing harassment by militant anti-choicers, refused to market it in the U.S. However in 1994, the New York City based Population Council offered to take the heat and acquired the drug's American patent rights. After two years of clinical trials, the organization applied to the FDA for permission to sell the drug. In July an advisory committee recommended approval.

The approval of RU-486 is not only good news for women seeking non-surgical abortions, its approval opens the door for additional research. Scientists believe that RU-486 holds promise as a treatment for cancer and a glandular condition known as Cushing's syndrome.

For anti-choicers the FDA's approval is a disaster. RU-486 can be given in a doctor's office rather than at a clinic. Protesters won't know where to set up their picket lines.

RU-486 does have some disadvantages. It must be taken within seven weeks of a woman's last menstrual period; it fails about 5% of the time; and it can have side affects, including cramping, nausea and severe bleeding. In Europe it is used for about 20% of all abortions. It is expected that, in part due to protests at clinics, women in the United States may choose RU-486 more frequently than women in Europe.

Anita Hill resigns

Anita Hill recently resigned from the University of Oklahoma law school saying she wants to work in an "uncompromising" academic environment (ha! good luck there).

The resignation was accepted unanimously by the university's Board of Regents, and it will be effective at the end of the fall semester.

Follies a success

A big thanks to all of you who helped make the Sixth Annual Lefty Follies Variety Show a big success. Many talented folks helped us out but the most memorable moment came as the incomparable Loretta sang "It's Only a Wee Wee." Thanks to all and we'll see you next year.

Abortion services inaccessible to many

Despite the fact that we do have a pro-choice president, abortion services remain inaccessible to millions of women. Eighty-four percent of counties (McLean included) in this country have no abortion provider and hundreds of thousand of women cannot afford the procedure.

Three years ago Voice for Choice and the Rape Crisis Center established the Abortion Assistance Fund. The fund is available to help McLean County women obtain abortions by providing financial assistance to women who have no means of paying for the procedure. We could use your help. Each year we are able to help a number of women but we know there are more women out there that we would like to be able to help. Please consider a donation to the Assistance Fund. Make your check payable to "Assistance Fund" and mail it to Voice for Choice, P.O. Box 905, Bloomington, IL 61702-0905.

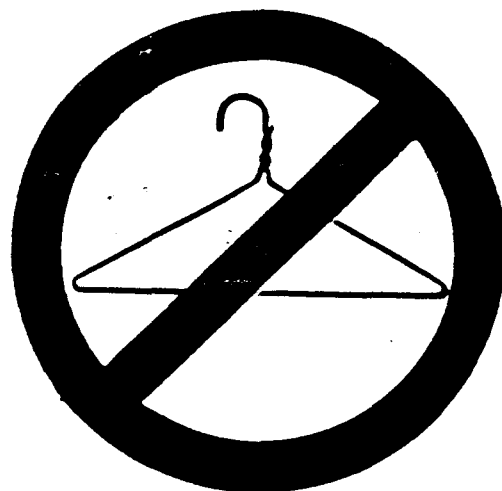
Most common infections are sexual

The nations most commonly reported infections in 1995 were sexually transmitted, and a disease that often has no symptoms topped the list, according to a government report.

Chlamydia, tracked for the first time last year, was the most reported infectious disease with 477,638 cases. Gonorrhea and AIDS were second and third, according to an annual report released last month by the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Gonorrhea, the most commonly reported disease in 1994, with 418,068 cases, fell to the number two spot last year with 392,848 cases. AIDS also dropped from 78,279 reported cases in 1994, to 71,547 cases reported in 1995.

The center's annual report relies on numbers compiled by epidemiologists in each state. Every year, the doctors decide which diseases to track, and this year they settled on a list of 52. The flu, which the states track voluntarily, was not on the list.



The politics of "partial birth" abortions

Bob Dole was counting on President Clinton's veto of the so called "partial birth abortion" ban to be a bigger issue among voters than it was. In fact Dole probably hurt himself even more by making abortion rights an issue he was willing to address.

While Dole's campaign, along with right-wing conservatives and the Christian Coalition, tried to make late term abortions an issue they ran into a few problems. First, their case was hard to make in the first place since even they have to admit that few hospitals will perform third trimester abortions and fewer still this particular controversial procedure. The second problem was the even to moderate voters who perhaps are uncomfortable with the procedure, Clinton had good cause to veto the bill, it contained no provision to protect the health of the mother. In fact, Clinton said he would have signed the bill had it contained exceptions for the life and health of the mother.

Miracle drug?

As Redux, the first new diet drug to hit the market in years is being promoted by its maker and by some doctors, keep in mind there are side effects. First there's the fatigue, diarrhea, vivid dreams and dry mouth. Also of concern is the fact that the drug has caused significant and possibly permanent brain damage in lab animals. It can also trigger a rare but frequently fatal human disorder called primary pulmonary hypertension, which destroys blood vessels in the lungs and heart. But perhaps most disturbing is the societal side effects, particularly the potential to support a concept of beauty which is not healthy, either physically (e.g., anorexia) or emotionally (self loathing). What we're trying to say is this, be who you are, if you're not satisfied with that for your own personal reasons fine, do what you feel you must do to achieve that sense of peace. But we think it would be a boring world indeed if we all looked like Barbie.

Juice may be harmful to babies

Many infants under six months of age who shouldn't be drinking fruit juice at all drink it in amounts that could put them at risk for health and developmental problems. This according to a survey conducted for the Institute of Pediatric Nutrition. The group says drinking juice at that age fills infants' small stomachs so there is no room for breast milk or infant formula, which contain the nutrients they need.



For Choice

Mississippi judge strikes down abortion laws

A dozen regulations in one of the nation's toughest abortion laws were struck down by a federal judge who said the rules imposed an unconstitutional burden on people seeking and providing abortions.

Judge William H. Barbour, Jr., of Federal District Court issued a preliminary injunction prohibiting Mississippi from enforcing the new rules, which are generally aimed at abortion doctors and clinics.

"We're dealing here with the constitutional rights of women," Judge Barbour said. "The right to obtain an abortion is their choice. That is the law of the land."

Mississippi's abortion regulations were broadened this year to include clinics that were within 1,500 feet of churches and schools. Other rules mandated at least five restrooms and the instillation of alarm and emergency power systems in clinics. Judge Barbour said he was most troubled by the provision that let the state seize clinic medical records for license investigations without deleting patient information. That right in effect "does away with doctor-patient confidentiality," he said.

The judge ruled in a lawsuit filed by two doctors, joined by the American Civil Liberties Union and Pro-Choice Mississippi.

HMOs want immunity

Health maintenance organizations which care for over 60 million people in the U.S. are telling the courts that they can't be held responsible for medical malpractice in cases involving patients who receive care through an employer-sponsored health plan.

The HMOs argue that they are protected against malpractice claims and lawsuits by a 1974 Federal law that regulates employee benefits. But Labor Secretary Robert Reich, who enforces the federal law, called that argument absurd, saying it would deprive many consumers of the right to sue for injuries caused by the negligence of their HMOs.

In the last three years, the Federal Government has filed friend-of-the-court briefs in a half-dozen malpractice cases against HMOs. In an interview Mr. Reich said the Administration was considering legislative proposals to clarify the rights of workers and their dependents who receive care through HMOs.

The issue is enormously important for consumers. Unlike insurance companies that underwrite fee-for-service plans, HMOs can exert vast influence over a patient's care by setting guidelines for treatment or limiting access to medical specialties. And yet in many cases, HMO is content that they cannot be held legally accountable for the quality of care because they do not make medical decisions.

The issue has considerable effect on doctors as well. In many cases, patients who sue HMOs also sue the doctors. Carol O'Brien, a lawyer at the AMA said, "HMOs are shifting virtually all of the risk patient care to physicians, even though the HMOs can force doctors to change their clinical decisions by threatening to terminate their contracts."

Courts have split on the issue, depending on the details of each case. From recent rulings it appears that patients have a better chance of winning cases against HMOs when they maintain that there was substandard care rather than an outright denial of health benefits. But the distinction is sometimes obscure.

When HMOs market themselves to the public, they often promise to provide high-quality care by choosing the best doctors and hospitals and monitoring their work to guarantee that it meets the highest standards. Many advertise that they have been accredited by an independent group like the National Committee for Quality Assurance. But in court, the same HMOs insist that they are not legally responsible for any injuries or deaths caused by the negligence of these doctors.

HMOs like U.S. Health Care, Kaiser Permanente, Prudential and Pacificare have asserted in court that malpractice claims against them are pre-empted by the 1974 law, the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, or ERISA. If a malpractice claim is pre-empted, it cannot be pursued and must be dismissed.

G. William Scott, a senior trial lawyer at the Labor Department, said: "This is the defense that HMOs are raising for everything now. Whenever they are sued, they say, 'We have no liability because we were administering an employee benefit plan.'" Karen M. Ignagni, president of the American Association of Health Plans, the leading trade group for HMOs, said the group had not become "very involved in the malpractice issue from a policy perspective."

Ben A. Singer, a spokesman for Pacificare, which has more than two million members in six states, summarized the position of his company and many other HMOs this way: "We contract with doctors and hospitals. If you feel you've been a victim of malpractice, you can pursue litigation against them but you can't turn around and sue the health plan."



Three recent cases are typical. In one, the Prudential Insurance Company of America argued that "ERISA completely pre-empts any claim which 'relates to' an employer sponsored health plan," so Prudential could not be held responsible for the medical malpractice of a doctor in its network in Illinois.

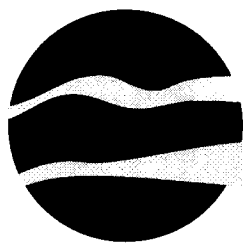
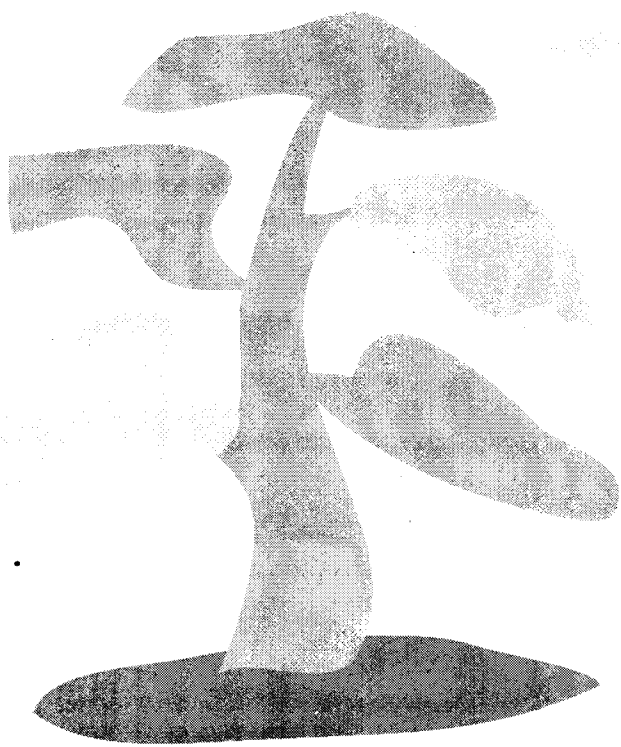
Imposing liability on health plans would cause "catastrophic increases in the cost of employer sponsored health care benefits, contrary to the intent of Congress," Prudential told a federal appeals court.

In another case, a Texas woman sued Kaiser Permanente, the nation's largest HMO, contending that it had failed to detect a brain tumor she had. Kaiser argued that federal law precluded such negligence claims because the woman, Letha Ann Revenell, was receiving care under a health plan sponsored by her husband's employer, Sears.

In the third case, U.S. Healthcare moved to dismiss a malpractice suit filed by two of its subscribers, Linda and Ronald Visonti, who said their daughter had been stillborn because of the negligence of one of the HMO's obstetricians.

HMOs provide comprehensive care in return for fixed monthly premiums. One way they control costs is by refusing to authorize tests, procedures and hospital admissions that they consider unnecessary. In a typical case, an HMO exercises its judgment in deciding whether a service is medically necessary but then says it has no legal responsibility for such medical judgments because they were "benefit decision," made in the course of managing an employee benefit plan.

Essentially it would appear that HMOs are trying to have it both ways. They want to control what tests and procedures can be performed on a patient (which would seem something akin to practicing medicine) but they do not want to be held accountable should a decision made by them about the treatment of a patient prove negligent.



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